

Musings
Magic
Special

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Fall 1996

MusingsTM MAGIC[®] SPECIAL



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CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction
- 3 **Mark Tedin** Interview
- 11 **Translating German Magic** Interview
- 13 **Phil Foglio** Interview
- 19 **Kaja Foglio** Interview
- 27 **Homelands** Designers Interview
- 33 **Susan Van Camp** Interview
- 35 Artwork Index
- 37 **Alliances** Designers Interview
- 43 **Ken Meyer, Jr.** Interview
- 49 **Mirage** Designers Interview
- 51 **Richard Garfield** Mini-Interview
- 53 **Pete Venters** Interview
- 59 **World Decks for Magic** Article

Introduction

Musings returns, at long last! And with a shift in contents, to boot! Yes, the collapse of the comic book market and the recent distribution changes made the past couple of years a trying one for many publishers and retailers. Since Calliope is both a publishing operation and a retail comic book store, we got hit from both sides! Fortunately, things are finally looking up.

One bright spot for retailers over the past couple of years has been the success of the collectible card game, *Magic: The Gathering*. Given the popularity of the game, and the crossover audience *Magic* shares with comic books, it seemed natural to produce a *Musings* special devoted to *Magic*. If this issue is successful, we may make it a series! There are certainly many more artists to interview, and many other stories to tell.

This doesn't mean that Calliope is ignoring the regular *Musings* magazine. *Musings* will, in fact, return next year, complete with its focus on comics, though perhaps at another publisher.

About this issue...

This issue features covers by Mark Tedin, one of *Magic*'s best artists. Susan Van Camp contributes many sketches to this issue, as well as an interview discussing *Magic* and her role-playing/card game, *Dragon Storm*. Phil and Kaja Foglio discuss *Magic*, art, and their new adult card game, XXXenophile, while Ken Meyer, Jr. discusses *Magic* and the comic book industry. The ever-helpful Pete Venters not only provided artwork and an interview, but contributed to the articles on the various *Magic* expansions. Pete was even so kind as to

arrange a mini-interview with Richard Garfield. Many of the designers and developers of the expansion sets provide insight into the creation of those sets in the articles dedicated to *Homelands*, *Alliances*, and *Mirage*. You will also find an interview with the German translators of *Magic* and an article on World Decks, the maximum variety way to play *Magic*!

Please be aware that *Magic* publisher **Wizards of the Coast®** is often referred to herein as *Wizards*, or simply *WotC*. I would like to extend a special thanks to *Magic* artist and *WotC* Continuity Coordinator Pete Venters, whose assistance in arranging various interviews with *WotC* personnel was invaluable. Thanks for taking the time out of your busy schedule, Pete! **Wizards of the Coast, Magic: The Gathering, and all expansion sets for Magic are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. © 1996 Wizards of the Coast.**

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World Famous Comics features a *Musings* Web Page, and may be reached at www.wfcomics.com/gallery.

Copies of *Musings* #1-4 are still available. Check the World Famous Comics Website for more information!

Feel free to let us know what you think of this issue, whether you'd like to see more *Magic Specials*, and what you'd like to see in the regular *Musings* magazine when we resume publishing next year. We appreciate your input!

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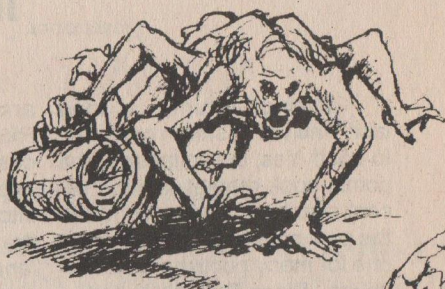
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MUTANT SABATEUR



NECROPOTENCE

Mark Tedin

Mark Tedin (pronounced teh-DEEN) was one of the original Magic artists, and helped to shape the artistic direction of the game. His inventive, detailed, and colorful pictures are among the best Magic card illustrations.

Steven Tice: *What Magic cards are you most proud of?*

Mark Tedin: I think two that come to mind pretty immediately would be Mindstab Thrull and Horror of Horrors, just because the ideas came fairly freely, from the left side of my brain. They just sort of popped onto the paper without any effort, which was a nice surprise.

ST: *Yeah, those are two of the cards I was going to specifically ask you about, actually. I have a list of cards that I feel are among your best, and both of those are on it!*

MT: Well, Mindstab Thrull started with a very quick pencil sketch, and then I elaborated the idea on larger illustration board and immediately painted it. I was done within a couple of hours, and it came out exactly the way I had envisioned it in my mind, which doesn't always happen.

ST: *What about Horror of Horrors?*

MT: It also started from a very brief sketch. I remember having a nightmare about a rather human-looking figure shrouded in darkness, and all these spotlights were shining on it. But the interior shapes didn't correspond with the outer contour, which made it very frightening.

ST: *So they just give you a description of what the card is about, and then you see what ideas come to mind?*

MT: Well, generally, they just give me the title of the card, like "Horror of Horrors" or "Mutant Saboteur" (which was later renamed "Mindstab Thrull"), but they don't give any more information unless requested, which I think is good because it frees me to come up with whatever concept I like.

ST: *What Magic cards are you least proud of, that didn't turn out quite the way you wanted them to?*

MT: There's one called Rebirth. I had sort of a grandiose idea for it, and for some reason I just wasn't into working on a complex picture that day, and it came out kind of flat and a little too cartoony. Let's see, what else...cards I definitely don't like...oh, probably Nevinyrral's Disk.

ST: *Oh, really?*

MT: Yeah, just because the hand doesn't exactly look realistic. I thought the idea was okay, but the execution could have been better. I should have just started from scratch, but sometimes I'll continue on a card when I should just put it down and start over. Sometimes I get good results from doing that, and sometimes I get bad results. And I consider that card a bad result.

ST: *What Magic cards posed the greatest artistic challenge to render?*

MT: Probably the ones that have a really abstract sort of name, and it's difficult to try to

come up with some kind of specific picture that corresponds with the concept, or no concept, to be more accurate.

ST: *Can you give me an example?*

MT: Let's see...Mana Matrix. There was no information given on it, I didn't know exactly what it was, but rather than come up with something that was overly descriptive, I tried to inject a little bit of mystery into it.

Another one that was difficult was Mind Bomb. It seemed like it was such an obvious solution to come up with a bomb and a brain, but actually I was going through all these other conceptual routes that didn't quite work, and...actually, I have to give Anson [Maddocks] credit. He said, "Well, why don't you just make a bomb in the shape of a brain." I said, "Well...okay." And, luckily, it worked out okay.

ST: *You've done Mana Vault, Mana Crypt, Mana Matrix, and Mana Clash. Have you become the unofficial "Mana" artist or something?*

MT: [laughter] I'm not really sure, it seems that way. Maybe it's because, when I hear them on a list, they sound the most intriguing, because they don't really have a specific element. And something in me wants to latch on and try to come up with an image for it.

ST: *What would you say are your strengths and weaknesses as an artist?*

MT: [pause] That's a hard one. It's so difficult to analyze your own work to begin with. I'd say that I have a definite interest in light and texture, and I think

that those are probably my best attributes so far.

ST: *Well, one aspect of your artwork that really stands out to me is color.*

MT: Oh, thanks.

ST: *Your use of color just amazes me.*

MT: I still struggle with that.

ST: *Really?*

MT: It was actually one of the first blocks that I had when I was in grad school. I was making these large four-foot oil canvasses, and trying to deal with color in a creative and unusual way was a challenge for me.

used to be when I was back in school, when I was practically a photo-realist. If I was going to say I had a weakness, I would say that I was not deliberate enough. [I wish] that I could simply take control of my imagery instead of trying to have it guide me around.

ST: *How do you go about creating a Magic card? What are the steps involved?*

MT: Well, the actual painting of the card doesn't take too long. The pre-planning stages for me are the things that are the most difficult and the most rewarding. I can sit on a conceptual sketch for a while and still not be happy with it, and unless I'm completely happy with the idea behind the card, or the visual idea,

as possible. But I'd hate to think that I was designing the card for the border, because that doesn't always work, and sometimes it can just be repetitive.

Brothers of Fire and Leviathan were obviously tailored to the color of the card just because of the subject matter. But there are other examples where I'll proceed as normally without really considering the border.

ST: *How does doing card game artwork differ from other projects that you've worked on?*

MT: I definitely feel that the final product is an abbreviated version of what I could be doing on a larger scale, and right now that's not bad because it's perfectly suited to my patience on working on a final piece. On the other hand, I feel that I'd like to work on a few more projects where the complexity of the image is increased or is larger, so that it might be more of a challenge, but it would also provide more artistic satisfaction.

ST: *Is there anything that you particularly enjoy about doing card artwork?*

ST: *Well, I'd say you've met that challenge!*

MT: I'd been working in black and white for so long that making the jump to color was a definite stretch.

ST: *I love the way you'll choose colors that aren't photo-realistic colors (Phyrexian Boon, for example). Instead, you'll pick a pair of colors like pink and green, say, and do a bunch of different shades of both of them so that they work off of each other.*

MT: Right. Sometimes an accidental solution can be the best, although I've seen that I seem to rely on accident a lot. I consider my work to be a lot more impressionistic than it

I don't really feel comfortable painting it. Usually, the act of painting won't be as satisfying as if I had waited for an idea with more visual punch to it.

ST: *The color of the border of a Magic card can often affect the final look of the painting.*

MT: Yes.

ST: *Do you take the color of the border into account when you're painting a card?*

MT: Generally not, although it probably creeps in in a subconscious way. I do like to take on a lot of black cards because they're the ones that end up the most luminescent because of the black border, and usually I'll take advantage of that as much

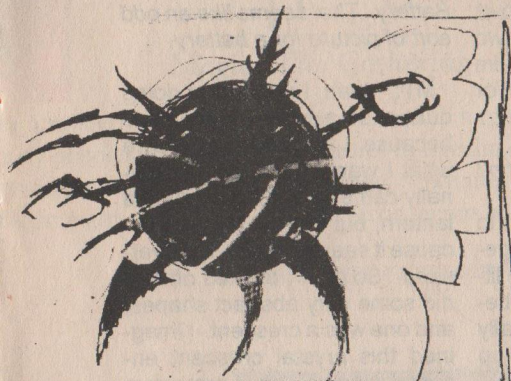
MT: No more or no less than any other project that I've worked on, I suppose, except that it's always exciting to see something of yours in print, and with Magic, or any other card game that I've worked on, you get that in spades, because you get to see your image printed thousands and thousands of times. Just having it out there is satisfaction enough.

ST: *What artwork were you inspired by?*

MT: I'm not really sure, I have pretty eclectic taste in artists. I can't really think of one overwhelming influence right now, although I was interested in some comics artists when I was younger, like John Byrne, Bill Sienkiewicz and Barry Windsor-

"Sometimes an accidental solution can be the best."

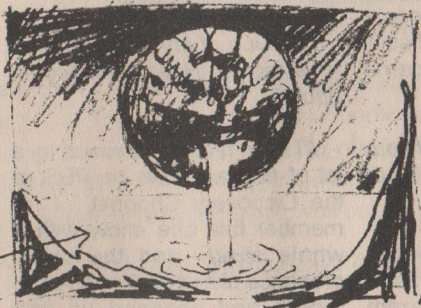
SPHERE OF ANNIHILATION



MARK JEDIN



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SEA OF MAGMA



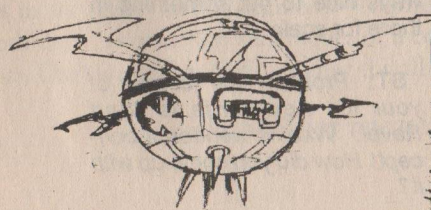
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WOODEN SPHERE



Smith. Right now, if I was going to name off a few artists that I enjoy the most, I could mention Giger, Brian Froud, and especially Wayne Barlowe. I really enjoy the imagery that they produce, but also the process that they go through in developing their ideas.

ST: *I'd like to ask you about a few specific cards. Chaos Orb is pretty popular. How did that picture come about?*

MT: Well, I first started out with some small thumbnail sketches, when trying to come up with a basic visual idea for the card. It was originally called Sphere of Annihilation, so it definitely had a destructive element to begin with. A lot of my early Magic cards seem to have a lot of circles in them, and I'm not really sure why that is. There's probably something subconscious going on. I remember designing a couple of sphere-like artifacts that had faces on them because having a personality definitely adds to the impact of the card (much like Lord of the Pit, which I did first). The one with the face with the lava coming out of its mouth appealed to me the most, because it was simple and I kind of liked the idea. It almost reminded me of *Zardoz*, with Sean Connery; *Zardoz* was a John Boorman film in the seventies dealing with a giant floating head. After that, I worked up a really quick sketch on some illustration board and then applied the paint. I remember doing it rather quickly because the idea was so clear in my head and I didn't have to mull over it too long.

ST: *What about Time Vault?*

MT: I'm not sure where that one came from. I didn't do preparatory sketches for it. I just had a general idea in my head, and then worked with it pretty quickly on some illustration board. I was doing a lot of ex-

perimenting with watercolors at that point. It was a lot of fun, because I hadn't worked with them before Magic, although my work is predominantly watercolor and acrylic gouache now.

I like the idea of these two denizens of some dark realm trying to destroy time and/or keep it at bay.

ST: *What about Juzam Djinn?*

MT: It was kind of difficult to get away from your basic "genie" idea. There's so much literature and art that's come before, so I don't think it was really possible at the time to come up with something completely new. And although I never read any of the books like *Arabian Nights*, I always remembered genies trying to intimidate the people that summoned them, so I suppose that's where that came from.

ST: *It's funny how a lot of your early cards are worth a lot of money now...*

MT: Yeah, its popularity surprises me, because I wasn't completely happy with Juzam Djinn after I'd finished it. It seemed a little too derivative of the demon in the movie *Legend* (although I tried consciously to come up with a new face and a new system of horns), which is probably why I jumped at the chance to redo it for an advertising campaign that the *Duelist* magazine is coming out with right now, because I really had a desire to update him and do the genie the way I had wanted to originally.

ST: *Feldon's Cane?*

MT: A friend of mine showed me some parts of surgical elements that his mother had given him, titanium elements for replacement joints. I was fascinated by the shape of the pieces and the textures, so in my mind I put together some kind of

imaginary contraption based on those basic titanium shapes.

ST: *Here's one I've really wondered about: Red Mana Battery. That seems like an odd sort of picture for a battery.*

MT: Yeah, I remember doing quite a few sketches for that one because I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted it to be. I originally came up with the idea of a lantern, but I threw that out because it seemed a little too over-used. So then I backed off and did some very abstract shapes, and one was a crescent. I imagined this crystal crescent encased in some sort of protective rock, that could be put inside of a cave and used for an entire population.

ST: *One of my favorite cards is Leviathan. How did that come about?*

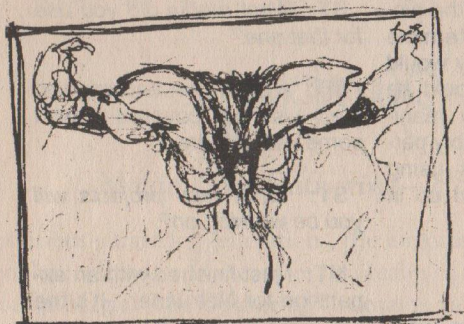
MT: I'm really impressed by a lot of nature shows on PBS or the Discovery Channel. I remember this one show with a whale shark, and the sheer presence of it when it opened its mouth and scooped up krill made the image stick in my mind. In this case, I increased the size of this animal one hundredfold and had it flying through the air to give it a new and surreal environment.

ST: *And then you added the little tower to put it in perspective.*

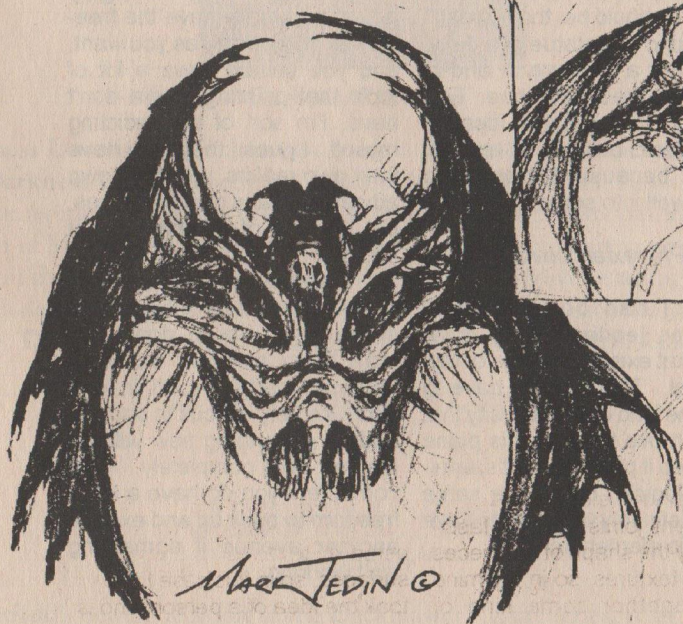
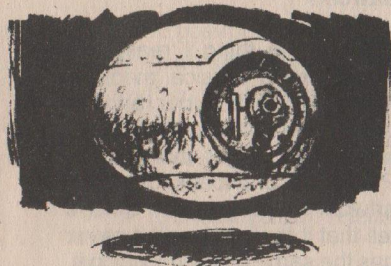
MT: Yeah, exactly. It's always nice to put something in there for scale.

ST: *Probably my favorite of your Ice Age cards is Mind Ravel. What a wonderful concept! How did you come up with it?*

MT: I've always been interested in textures and irregular surfaces, so in this case I sort of took the idea of a person who is



MANA VAULT



MARK JEDIN ©



unraveling from the top down and took it to an extreme...I'm not really sure, it seemed to be another one of those cards that came out of left field, and I can't quite explain what it's all about.

ST: *It was intuitive.*

MT: Yeah, it was really intuitive. It wasn't extremely logical or descriptive of anything specific, but I definitely wanted to give it an odd, surrealistic look. Dali did that a lot, and I still can't understand how he was able to come up with the complex types of images he did.

pg, 39], I had to look at the picture again and try to determine what the rest of his story would be. In this case he would be some kind of magically reanimated corpse that probably performs nefarious deeds using some powers he picked up in the afterlife.

ST: *Phyrexian Boon?*

MT: I knew that there were going to be two different cards made for it, so I decided to make just one piece with its own dual nature; [it's a] creature that gives power to its worshipers, but at the same time smites its

ST: *What media did you use for that one?*

MT: I used pen and ink and then I simply covered it with some watercolors.

ST: *What new projects will you be working on?*

MT: I just finished with an expansion for Netrunner. It's the first batch of cards that are completely rendered in the computer rather than being a paper illustration. So I used a lot of 3-D programs, a lot of Photoshop, a lot of collage. I think that the results were mixed, but it was definitely a good experiment.

ST: *What are the differences between doing computer artwork and doing conventional artwork?*

MT: One thing I really like about having physical media in front of you is that your range of options for manipulation is always a lot larger than digital. Plus, one drawback of digital artwork is that you can always tell that it is digital, and it never has the same tactile quality to it.

On the other hand, one thing I like about digital imagery is that you really have the freedom to go as crazy as you want, and you usually have a lot of tools that painting media don't have...I'm sort of contradicting myself. I guess they both have their own realms, with their own advantages and disadvantages, but it's kind of complex to get into it.

One thing about computers is that you do have the ability to erase what you've done and start from scratch, but with physical media it's all in one shot. It's very difficult to back up and do something new without starting over completely. With computers you do have a lot of freedom to back up and explore another avenue if something isn't working.

"I still don't feel that I've really hit my stride, yet, as an illustrator."

ST: *What about Necropotence?*

MT: That one was a pretty direct reference to a thumbnail sketch that I had made in one of my sketchbooks. I pretty much transferred it the way it looked in the sketch into a large, colored piece. Necropotence is another example of a card that doesn't really lend itself to a lot of specific, descriptive themes or messages, because it's just a name, and even the name itself doesn't give a description. Essentially, the name "Necropotence" said that it had something to do with death and also with some kind of magical power, so the first thing that popped into my mind was putting some kind of reanimated death figure with some magical emanation coming from him; beyond that, the card is pretty abstract.

When I did a full-figure illustration [of the Necropotence creature] for the *Duelist* [#11,

enemies. Originally I did a tower-like, organic building or sculpture that worshipers were receiving power from. But they rejected the sketch because WotC had a definite idea of what the card should be, that it wasn't some kind of a statue of a deity, but rather a creature in and of itself. So I redid that one. Fortunately, I reused the idea for the organic building in another game, because it translated pretty well into something else.

ST: *Phyrexian Devourer?*

MT: I had done a lot of sketches [earlier] about creatures that exist on a plane of raw material. There would have to be some kind of monstrosity that would move through this plane and keep it pruned. So it's semi-technological, but at the same time I definitely wanted it to have a mystic element to it.

ST: *"I wonder if a green background would look nicer than a blue one."*

MT: Yeah, exactly, and without too many steps you can do that pretty easily.

ST: *What other projects are you working on right now?*

MT: I'm finishing up some cards for the next Vampire expansion, *The Sabbath*. They basically gave me free license on this expansion to be strange and wacky with it, which has been a lot of fun. That should be coming out this Fall.

ST: *Is there anything you'd like to say about WotC's controversial new flat fee policy for Magic?*

MT: I guess that all I can say is that it's disappointing but not surprising. I get the impression that WotC is modeling itself after an industry that I've avoided for the past five years, which is the comics industry, where the working relationships between artists and companies have historically been pretty inequitable. Originally, we shared in the success or failure of Magic, but soon after the game started becoming wildly successful, our cut of that success became a casualty.

ST: *What struck me as strange about it is that with comics you had a work-for-hire policy that was standard for decades, but which in recent years has been breaking down, with creator's rights becoming a big thing. But with WotC, it started out very creator-friendly and now seems to be going in the opposite direction.*

MT: Yeah, I think so. That definitely seems to be the case, at least with the Magic project. I'm still doing projects for [WotC] that still have the old royalty system because they're still consid-

ered high-risk, but I find it kind of strange that they would put a cap on an agreement that we had made a long time ago, in the beginning, that was essentially win-win for both the creators and the company. I'm not angry about it anymore, but it's definitely been an education.

ST: *I was recently reading an interview with a Magic artist who said that you were his favorite Magic artist. Then I was talking to another major Magic artist recently, and when I mentioned that you were my favorite Magic artist, he said, "He's my favorite Magic artist, too!"*

MT: That's cool.

ST: *How do you feel about the fact that you seem to be really respected by your peers?*

MT: I think it's great, but I guess there's a little bit of pressure there...[laughter]...on the

the same table and compete, and it was really the competition that kept us both on our toes. And it's still that way, at least I hope it's that way, because I'd hate to see either one of us get soft. We still go out and draw together at coffee shops. Sometimes if I'm having a bad day, he'll have a bad day, or vice versa. And if he's doing something that's really inspiring, it'll motivate my mind to come up with something just as unique.

ST: *Is there anything you'd like to say about your experience with Magic?*

MT: Just that it's been a lot of fun for the past four years, and despite the fact that a lot of people seem to enjoy my artwork, I still don't feel that I've really hit my stride, yet, as an illustrator. I know I still have a long way to go, and the Magic project has put a lot of attention on my work, but I still have the need to im-

"Originally, we shared in the success or failure of Magic."

downside. It makes me feel really great that someone who is in basically the same boat that I am really enjoys the stuff that I do. It's sort of like a very large mutual admiration society with a lot of us. I'm what you'd call the oldest living Anson fan, because I've known him since third grade. I admire a lot of the other artists, as well...

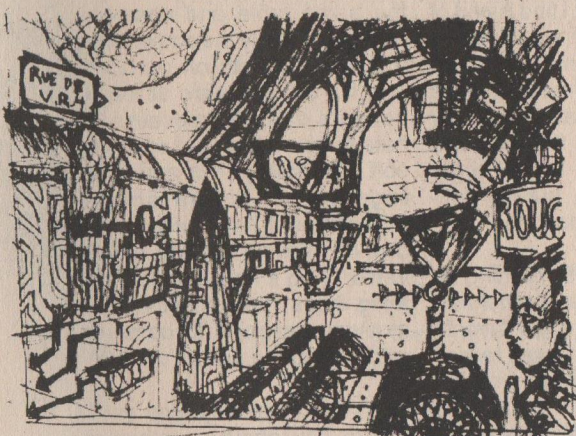
ST: *I suppose you and Anson were always competing with each other?*

MT: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Even in high school, we would sit down across from each other at

prove, and (I guess) to impress other people. I think that's always a motivating factor. I'd hate for my artwork to reflect any laziness on my part.

ST: *Well, once an artist becomes complacent, the artwork usually starts going downhill.*

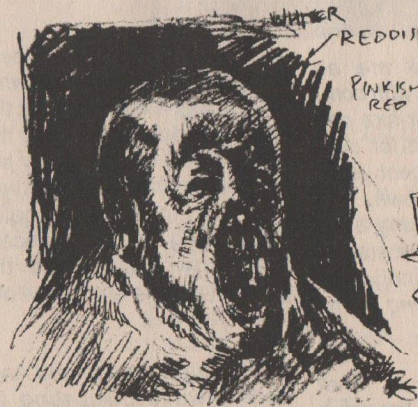
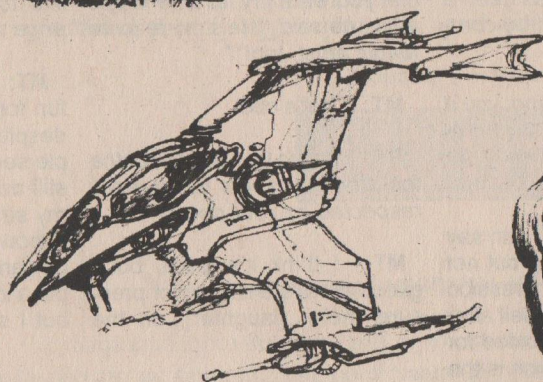
MT: Yeah, yeah. Even now, I've been doing illustration for four years, and I definitely have the urge to break into other creative avenues that will keep me inspired, even if it is just to keep me busy and keep me in practice. ■



PARIS CITY NET



MARL JEDIN ©



WATER
REDDISH OUTLINE
PINKISH-RED
IRIDESCENT GREEN

ABOMINATION

"ONE OF THE MANY FLOATING HEADS"

SILVER-BLACK TEETH

GREY-PINK BACKGROUND

COLOR & SHAPE
DERIVED FROM
COVER OF
FANTASY BOOK
DISTORTION OF LEONARDO?

POKE (CARTOON) MARSHONE
IRIDESCENT (BLUE BORDER) SHEEN

Translating Magic

by Steven Tice

Translating a game as complex as Magic is no easy task. German translators Hanno Girke and Bernd Bolzenius answered numerous questions about translating Magic in general, and German Magic in particular.

What are the most difficult parts of the translation process?

When we get the cards first, we just have the file containing the name and the abilities of the card. In most cases, it is not hard to find a proper name for the card. But sometimes you really don't know what the titles and abilities have in common, and we have to wait for the artwork to get a proper translation for the title, one that represents not only the abilities, but also the artwork, and is not too different from the English original. Another thing that causes us bad headaches is minor template changes by R&D. If you're used to a genre of cards, you're used to translating them in one way. If you've used one template a dozen times, you know it by heart. So if there's all of a sudden one little change, you really have to concentrate on not using the old one. Another difficult part is finding equivalents for abilities like "phasing," "flanking," and "islandhome." It normally takes us a few weeks of discussions with our playtesters and our distributor to find a translation everyone accepts. But that's part of the process, and we spread that discussion [among many people] to get a wide acceptance on those expressions.

Have there been any specific cards that were translation nightmares?

Naturally, there are a lot of cards that cause a little trouble. In most cases, either the name of the card or the card text gets too long, as the German language normally needs up to 35% more space than English. Ironwood Treefolk, as an example, has to be translated as "Treefolk with iron roots." But that didn't fit on the card, and, depending on the different type-setting devices used for the different editions, we had up to now three different names for that card—just slightly, but significantly, different.

What has the public response to German Magic been?

The response to Magic in Germany has been, and is, very positive. It seems that playing with German cards is now even accepted by the hard core players. Beginners mostly prefer German cards, so it's now kind of a grass roots thing. We also get a lot of positive comments about the translation.

What rules concepts were particularly difficult to translate into German?

As a non-native English speaker, you do not really care how strange a Magic expression sounds. As long as the native speakers don't care, you also don't care. But as soon as it gets to the translation into your mother tongue, you start really wondering how it sounds. You can't go and translate word for word, it has to fit into the "normal" use of the language. The actual *Mirage* rulebook was

translated by one of our playtesters, a really good tournament player. I'm glad I just had to do the editing on the new rules concepts ([for instance,] the Timing Rules), not the translating. It was hard to find a new expression for Phasing, as we didn't want to use the word "Phase." In German, this name was prone to confuse a new player with the phase system in Magic, so we chose "Instabilität."

How difficult is it to fit a translation of flavor text, or of a particularly complicated card, into the same space it occupies in the English version? I would imagine that Ice Cauldron caused some big headaches.

As mentioned before, the German language needs more space. So sometimes we have to put the font to a really small size. But that doesn't cause a headache, at least not with us.

Have there been any particularly interesting errors in previous translations?

Sure there have. In the first print run, the 3rd Edition black border, we had a Verduran Enchantress that allowed you to draw a card on each spell successfully cast, a Dwarven Weaponsmith that allowed you to put a +1/+1 counter on every creature you control for a sacrificed artifact, and some more. We also had a handful of cards with layout errors, [for instance] a Swamp with the text of the Drudge Skeletons.

What protocol is used when deciding whether or not to maintain a fictitious name? For in-

stance, *Aliban's Tower* is translated as *Armax' Turm*. Why *Armax* instead of *Aliban*? And *Jayemdae Tome* is *Ketos Zauberbuch* [*Keto's Spellbook*]. Why?

We stick to the original card names in most cases. But if our playtesters tell us that a name really doesn't sound good, or if they have a special meaning in German, we look for a new one (also if there are any legal problems with names). *Aliban*, for example, was changed to *Armax*, after some of our playtesters always referred to that card as "Ali Baba's Tower."

Some names are eliminated in favor of names that better reflect the card's function. Are there any guidelines for deciding when to do this?

We always have to check if there has been a card with a similar name, and if there's the slightest chance to mix cards up, we normally opt to get some other translation that also reflects the card's function but is unique so far.

Why is *Onulet* translated as *Opfertisch* [*Sacrifice Table*], and *Winter Orb* as *Frostbringer*?

Opfertisch is the proper translation for *Onulet*. As the German language doesn't use the word *Onulet*, and people would have asked what it is, we stuck to the translation. The translation of *Winter Orb* as *Frostbringer* refers to the fact that in German mythology, most of the famous artifacts had names given. We also have some translation problems if the words 'orb' or 'sphere' are involved. So we were really happy when someone came up with the name *Frostbringer*, because it reflects the card in a really nice and telling way.

Why is the *Samite Alchemist* translated as *Samitischer Alchimist*, but the *Samite Healer* is translated as *Feldscher*?

In my opinion, the guys who were in charge with the first German edition really didn't know what to do with the title 'Samite'. When doing *Homelands*, we got twenty pages of background and storyline and lots of stuff that helped us to get into the story, that told us what was behind all those names. We now get really great support by the Continuity Department, and that helps us quite a lot.

What is the best thing about being a Magic translator?

It is great to know the cards half a year earlier than anyone else, even if you can't tell anyone. It is great to see how an expansion grows, how it changes, how it gets shape. It is great to be part of the playtesting circle, to get your own input into it. But the most important thing for us is that we know that we deliver the really good translation that Magic deserves. If I knew I was doing a poor and incompetent [job], the first thing I'd do is to step down and get the job into someone else's hand.■

ELVISH SCOUT
SPOT ILLO SKETCH



Phil Foglio

Phil Foglio first came to attention as the writer and artist of the role-playing game cartoon, "What's New?", in *Dragon*. In recent years he has done mainstream comic book work for DC Comics, published his own adults-only comic book, *XXXenophile* and his science fiction/humor series *Buck Godot*, and illustrated numerous Magic cards. He has spent most of 1996 working on his own card game, *XXXenophile*, inspired by the comic book.

Steven Tice: *What's the advance word on the XXXenophile card game? How are people receiving it?*

Phil Foglio: Well, the response that we've gotten has been tremendous, actually. Basically, what we're hearing from shop owners and distributors is, "Hey, this is amazing! We haven't seen this much interest in a card game in the last year and a half!" We've already sold half of our initial print run.

ST: *How did you go about creating the XXXenophile card game?*

PF: Well, I hired a guy named James Ernest, and said, "James, write me a card game."

ST: *That's about all there was to it?*

PF: Pretty much. [laughter]

ST: *How did the artists who provided artwork for XXXenophile feel about getting the opportunity to create artwork a bit more explicit than they would have been allowed to create for, say, Magic?*

PF: Oh, they liked that very much! There were a lot of people who were saying, "Let me get this straight: I get to draw naked people, and you're going to pay me, too?" [laughter] So it worked out pretty well. When people enjoy what they're doing, they give you some of their best work.

ST: *If the game does well, will there be expansions?*

PF: What we're talking about doing now is...basically, for the next six months, people will be play-testing the game much more extensively than we ever could. So we'll collect all of the problems, probably cut problem cards, replace some art that we're not as happy with (if there is any), and redo that, and then issue what you might call a perfect set, one with all of the bugs out of it. That's probably what we will market for the foreseeable future.

ST: *Sounds much like Magic when it first became popular. They discovered which cards didn't work and what needed to be fixed.*

PF: Right, but we're not planning any expansions as such, because I don't think the game needs them.

ST: *When did your involvement with Magic begin?*

PF: Well, they asked [Phil's wife] Kaja if she wanted to do work for Magic. This was before Magic came out. They asked her if she wanted to do artwork for *Arabian Nights*, and she said, "Sure!" Then two or three expansions down the line, they got around to asking me!

ST: *What Magic cards are you most proud of?*

PF: I'm very happy with Presence of the Master, and Mirror Universe (of course), and White Scarab. Gosh, let's see. I think Infernal Darkness came out really well.

ST: *What Magic cards are you least proud of?*

PF: That's hard to say. Obviously, I like them all, otherwise I wouldn't turn them in. I guess the one that I'm more surprised about is Killer Bees.

ST: *Really?*

PF: Yeah, because it was a fairly simple picture. It's just a bunch of bees with swords! And everybody just loves it because it's such an incredibly killer card. So they associate that with the art, so in my opinion they like the art more than other work I'm more pleased with. Not that I'm complaining, but I look at that artwork and think, "Well...it's just a couple of bees!" Y'know? But don't get me wrong, it came out well, and everyone likes it, so I guess I'm doing something right!

ST: *Which Magic cards posed the greatest artistic challenge to render?*

PF: Whew! [pause] Lure! I think Lure was. I had to illustrate this abstract concept, and do it in such a simple way that it conveyed what the card did. Or ideally that's what you should do. And on that one I think it worked very well.

ST: *What would you say are your strengths and weaknesses as an artist?*

PF: Well, my strengths are that I'm very fast, I meet deadlines, I have a good sense of movement, I can tell a story in a painting, and I have a sense of humor. I'm also good at lighting.

My weaknesses are: I'm not as good an artist as I would like to be (I lack polish), my grasp of anatomy is not what I would like it to be [laughter], and I've got a lot to learn yet about materials and techniques. And I can never find a good brush! [laughter]

ST: *Is there anything you particularly enjoy about doing card artwork?*

PF: Gosh, it's one of the highest paid illustration jobs in the United States, and I'm doing it! That's probably the thing I like most about it!

ST: *How do you go about creating a Magic card? What are the steps you go through?*

PF: I get the assignment. I sit down and do a couple of sketches, and pick the one that I think is best and fax that to the art director. The art director looks at it, gets back to me, and says either, "Go with it," or, "We like this but here are some changes," or "Gosh, this just bites, start over." Very, very rarely do I ever get that! Then I sit down, get a piece of illustration board, measure it out, go through my reference library for costume, background, or whatever, get all my reference together, pencil it out, and paint it.

ST: *The color of the border of a Magic card can often affect the final look of a painting. Do you take the color of the border into account when painting a card?*

PF: Sometimes, yeah. It depends what the picture is. Sometimes it doesn't make any difference, sometimes it does. I think Greed works a lot better because it's a black border than

if it were a white or a blue border. But there are some like Lure, again, for instance, where it doesn't really make any difference what color the border is.

ST: *What artwork were you inspired by?*

PF: I was inspired by a science fiction artist named Frank Kelly Freas, a science fiction cartoonist named Vaughn Bode, a humorist named Charles Dana Gibson, and Japanese animation.

ST: *How much of an influence have comic books been on your artwork?*

PF: Gosh, almost none.

ST: *Your artwork is very humorous by nature, which is something that some Magic fans don't like because they don't like humor in their serious game.*

PF: Right.

ST: *How do you feel about that reaction, and does it influence your approach to your Magic artwork at all?*

PF: I think they have way too little to do [laughter], and no, it doesn't affect me AT ALL.

ST: *Now that the XXXenophile card game is coming out, will you be returning to Buck Godot and the XXXenophile comic book?*

PF: Well, I'll be finishing *Buck Godot*. I have two issues left, I'm working on that now. *XXXenophile*... I will have to wait and see whether I do any more of them. Honestly, comic books at this time, especially black and white independent comics, are not returning enough money to make them worth doing, in my opinion, if I can't advertise them. And Diamond will not let me advertise adult product. For in-

stance, we tried to do a full page ad for the *XXXenophile* trading card game, and they wouldn't let us do one. So the problem is, if we were thinking about doing a *XXXenophile* comic, we'd want to advertise it. And we can't. And Diamond is now the only distributor. So we're going to have to see what happens. I might wind up not doing any *XXXenophiles* for a while.

ST: *I'd like to ask you about some of your specific Magic cards, and how you came up with the ideas for them. What about Mirror Universe?*

PF: Well, that one was pretty easy. They said, "It's an artifact, it swaps lives." So I figured, "Mirror Universe, it must be a mirror or something." [laughter] It was a way to show a version of the character having the life force sucked out of her.

ST: *What about Presence of the Master?*

PF: Presence of the Master... quite honestly, I was trying to come up with something completely different. So, finally, it's four o'clock in the morning, "this just is not working! Aah!" So I just decided to do something quick and funny and art nouveau. For the central figure I wanted somebody who looked distinguished, and I was rummaging through my files, and I found this fine picture of Albert Einstein. I thought, "Wait a minute. He cancels all enchantments! Perfect!"

Since then, I've had some people who've complained and said, "Albert Einstein shouldn't be in Dominia. This is an unnecessary intrusion of the real world into our game." And, yeah, they have been drowned out by the ones who like it. But I've got two responses [to that reaction]. One is, "Well, obviously Dominia is some sort of parallel world, and this is Einstein's doppelganger. We probably all

Att: Sandro ~~Pedro~~
Caro lito

- Phil Foglio

foaminess
a sure sign
of the French
moderately
excessive
intolerance,

Browse

have some sort of doppelganger in Dominia." [laughter] And the other response is, "Tough!" [laughter]

ST: *The Icatian Scout picture from Fallen Empires—*

PF: Oh, yeah! [laughter] The non-flying creature who flies! Well, I didn't know. They just said, "A scout." I just got the idea, "Hey, one of the things about a scout is that you're not supposed to see him, so what could be better than a guy on a bat?"

ST: *How did you arrive at the colors you used on that card?*

PF: Well, I knew it was a white card, so I made it a white bat. I figured the guy riding it would, if not blend in, at least not stand out too much. Of course, a lot of people say that they don't even notice there's a guy riding on it.

ST: *What about the Runed Arch from Ice Age?*

PF: Well, they said "Runed Arch," and I said, "Well, what does it do?" They said, "It gets you from one place to another." "Oh! Terrific!" So that just suggested the idea of a bridge between two different realities, which I tried to convey by the fact that on one side of this arch there's this huge thing, but you can't see any of it because of the rest of the arch.

On that one I had some fun. If you can read runic, the Viking language, the alphabet—I did it phonetically—says, "Built by the quaint old Runed Arch Company." And then on the side there it says, "Phil loves Kaja," but that got covered up by the guy there. [laughter]

ST: *What about Anarchy?*

PF: That was one concept that I was very pleased with the way it came out. They basically

said, "it destroys all Plains." How do you show that? This guy waving a staff, [with] snow on one side and everything else on the other, seemed to work pretty well. [Editor's note: *Anarchy actually destroys all white permanents*].

ST: *One of my favorite Phil Foglio cards is Fyndhorn Pollen. I love the way you got a three-dimensional effect to it.*

PF: Oh, thank you.

ST: *How did you accomplish that?*

PF: That one was done with pen and ink, and Dr. Martin's dyes. The plant in the foreground was done with pen and ink. By the way, originally that was given to me with the name "Valerian Pollen." People come up and say, "That's a Valerian plant!" Yes, it really is, because that's what they told me, and then they changed the name to "Fyndhorn." I penciled the figure in the background in, and then colored that with Dr. Martin's dyes; but instead of sketching in the figure with ink, I just erased the pencil lines.

ST: *The Orcish Librarian is a cute card.*

PF: Well, that's like a bull in a China shop, you know. Put this stupid thing in this setting and try to come up with something ridiculous.

ST: *Perhaps you're going to be doing a number of cards in this vein, since you just did Browse for Alliances!*

PF: Yeah, yeah, I guess they're giving me all of the "guy in the library" cards. [laughter] They gave me those two; so far they haven't given me any more! [laughter]

ST: *Another of my favorites is Unlikely Alliance from Alliances.*

It's such a hilarious card, and maybe the most detailed of your Magic cards. How did that come about?

PF: Well, that was pretty much the same as all of the others. Originally it was called "Marriage of Convenience." They gave me the core idea, but I was the one who made the bride this weird cyclops. Then [some people at WotC] said, "We don't know if there are any Cyclops in Dominia!" [laughter] "Did you ever say there weren't?" "Well, no, I guess not." "Well, I guess there are, now!"

ST: *I guess they're getting a lot more careful with that kind of thing now?*

PF: They're certainly trying to.

ST: *Well, is there anything you'd like to say, in general, about your Magic artwork?*

PF: Well, I'm very pleased and proud to be here! What the hey! It's been a tremendous opportunity both from a career point of view and financially. Wizards has treated us pretty well in most respects. It's a chance to get my work out to an entirely new generation of people. I'm ready to use this to go on to better things.

ST: *I take it you're not as distressed about Wizards' new flat fee policy as some of the other artists are?*

PF: Kaja came up with the perfect way of phrasing that, which is: okay, they were paying royalties and we were very happy. They're no longer paying royalties. We're still happy, but not as happy as we were.

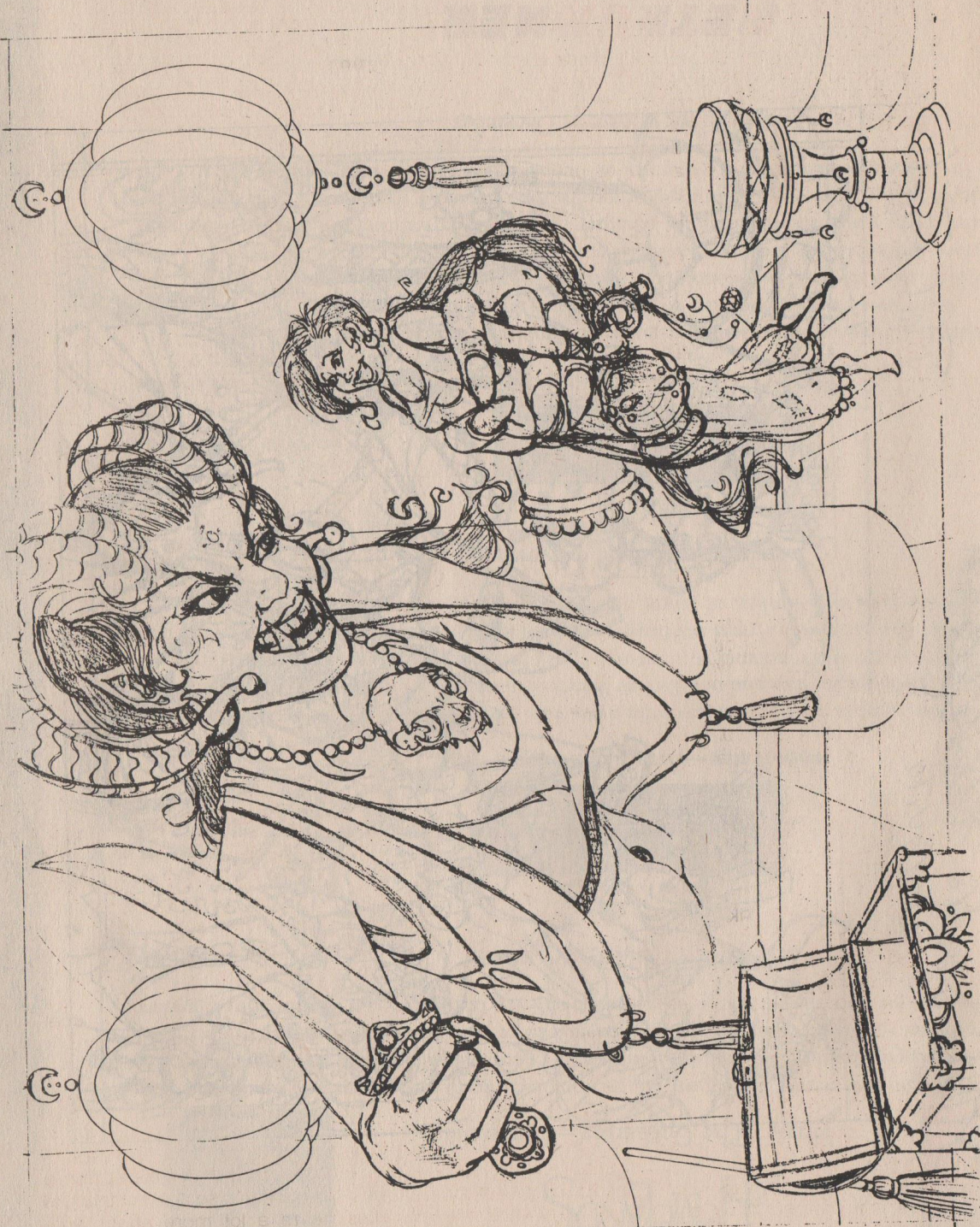
ST: *I guess that sums it up!*

Attn: Sandra ~~Corvito~~
Corvito

Phil Fogel



Marriage of Convenience



Kaja Foglio

Kaja Foglio first came to prominence as a Magic artist with the *Arabian Nights* expansion set. She has gone on to contribute cards for almost every set since, as well as for other card games, including husband Phil's XXXenophile.

Steven Tice: *What Magic cards are you most proud of?*

Kaja Foglio: Spirit Link, Wind Spirit...I love the Bird Maiden dearly, not for the technical part of the card, but just because she's so cute and happy. But [laughter] I look at it now and think, "Oh, I wish I could repaint that. I could do so much better now." [laughter]

ST: *What Magic cards are you least proud of?*

KF: Well, there are some I don't like as well as others, but I'm kind of pleased with all of them.

ST: *What Magic card posed the greatest artistic challenge to render?*

KF: [pause] There were a couple that posed a challenge that I didn't feel that I quite met. That was very early on. The one I did meet, Spirit Link...up until that point, I hadn't done any realistic work. And one of my friends was being a bit disparaging about it. You know, "I like what you do, but of course you can't do this other stuff." It got me annoyed, so I sat down and just did that. And it's still one of the best pieces I've done. That was interesting because I didn't know I could do it.

At the beginning, when I was first assigned the work, I had been doing a lot of cartoon work, and most of that had been pen and ink, then colored with

watercolors or Dr. Martin's dyes. And when Jesper [Myr-fors] gave me the art assignment, I said, "Have you seen my work?" He said, "Yes, I've seen your work in art shows, I really like it." I said, "Great! I'll do this!" I went home and sat down at my desk and thought, "Good Lord! I sure hope I can paint!" [laughter] I'd done a couple of paintings before, but not enough to be completely confident with it.

So I'd say that those first few I did for *Arabian Nights* were quite a challenge, just because you have to convince yourself that you *can* [do the job]. Some people I know have *never* gotten over that, so [laughs] I'm very pleased that I *did*!

ST: *It's interesting that you introduced one of Magic's first black characters on Spirit Link...*

KF: Well, I went through the reference photos that I had and found a beautiful woman in just about the pose I needed, and it was ideal. [laughs] So it wasn't especially a choice, one way or another, it just kind of happened.

ST: *Why does your artwork range between Phil-style humor and solid realism?*

KF: Well, you're seeing me learning. You're seeing a range between what I was doing back in high school before I'd ever seen Phil's work—I was learning a lot from looking at old Disney work, some of Wendy Pini's *Elfquest*, looking at a lot of that kind of thing. And that suited me fine up until I met Phil, and realized that my stuff was being compared to his. Nobody likes that, nobody likes to be thought of as derivative. So I've been trying to go in another direction,

just to try to get away from that. The alternative would be to get away from Phil, and I'm not really willing to do that! [laughter] So I'm just learning, trying to get more realistic, trying to get my own look.

ST: *Can you tell me anything else about your artistic background?*

KF: I always drew. I did a lot of cartoony stuff in high school. Then I had a couple of friends I drew with a lot. We'd draw the same things and kind of compete, and we'd bounce ideas off of each other. It's so nice to have someone who does what you do to work with. I'm not one of these solitary artists, I work very well around other people. So that was nice.

I got into college and made the mistake of going to a college that was very snobbish in a lot of ways, and very caught up in the whole, "Well, what I do is art, and what you do is tripe" kind of thing.

ST: *I guess most colleges are like that nowadays.*

KF: That's really unfortunate. I know there are some places [that are different], but this was much more of a "fine arts" place, and they didn't want you to draw the model...[My favorite quote] is, "No, no, you've got it all wrong, don't draw the model, draw what the model does to you." [laughter] Well, I think that that's fine, but I think that before you start doing that kind of thing you need a grounding in how to draw in the first place. I feel that I kind of suffered from a lack of that, so now I'm trying to learn a lot more about what things actually look like and how to draw them. I also try to keep

the imagination and the interest in, but...[sighs].

It would be nice to have a range. Even Picasso, who did all the Cubist things that are very chaotic and don't look like anything much to most people, could draw very, very well. He could draw realistically if he wanted to, he was just exploring other aspects of his art. When he was doing the chaotic, Cubist pieces, he wasn't interested in making it look exactly like what the eye sees. But at least he had a grounding in how to do it if he wanted to. And I think that helps any art that you do, even cartoons. If you're doing cartoons, it helps to be able to draw realistically, so that you know what to exaggerate.

ST: Right. I think that Bill Watterson or Jeff Smith would be good examples.

KF: Oh, Watterson's a genius. I haven't ever seen any of Jeff Smith's realistic work, so I couldn't say, though what he does is wonderful. But Watterson is just...whew, man! [laughter] I'm just convinced that he can do anything. [laughter]

ST: How does doing card game artwork differ from other projects that you've worked on?

KF: I don't know, most of what I do is card game artwork! [laughter] Really, my first professional job was Magic. I've been doing a lot of card art. Up until recently, the card art was tiny. It's only 5 1/2" by 7". Then you go and look at a Rubens, and it takes up what looks like an entire city block, and you just kind of sigh, "Oh, I want to paint something big!" But now, for Magic, we're starting to do them larger if we want to. That's been very refreshing, very nice. And they get a better piece out of it. Any time you do something larger, it looks really good when you shrink it down.

Card art, in a lot of ways, especially now, has a lot of restrictions. It's supposed to look like a certain thing. They'll say, "This is a guy, and he's riding a horse, and here's the outfit that he's supposed to wear." Sometimes you take things like that and just put your art into it and make it really good, and turn it into something really nice. And sometimes it's just a guy on a horse, and it's really flat. So what I'm starting to feel right now is a real [urge] to do some work of my own, that means something to me. That's something I've been hearing from a lot of Magic artists. "Oh, I don't have time for my personal work now." Well, I never really *did* have a lot of time for personal work. But now I'm starting to feel like I really want to make some [laughs]. But I don't want to stop doing Magic cards, so I just make time.

ST: Will you be doing any cards for the upcoming new artwork in 5th Edition?

KF: I don't have any assignments for that. I have a couple for Mirage. But I've been told that a lot of the pieces I've already done are still in. I don't know how accurate that will be when the final cut comes, but that's what I've been told.

ST: Is there anything that you particularly enjoy about doing card artwork?

KF: Oh, it's wonderful! I mean, aside from the fact that they pay well and they take your piece of work and they put it on little cards that they ship all over the world—which I have to say is a big thrill, for me. One of the big things I love about this is seeing my work in print. I love to see it in print, I love to see it on magazine covers or on cards or...just everywhere. And that's wonderful. Phil and I were guests of honor at Origins, which is a big gaming conven-

tion, and they had a painting that Phil and I had done together. They blew it up huge and they had it hanging on the wall near registration, and I thought, "Oh, it looks great!" [laughter]

ST: What would you say are your strengths and weaknesses as an artist?

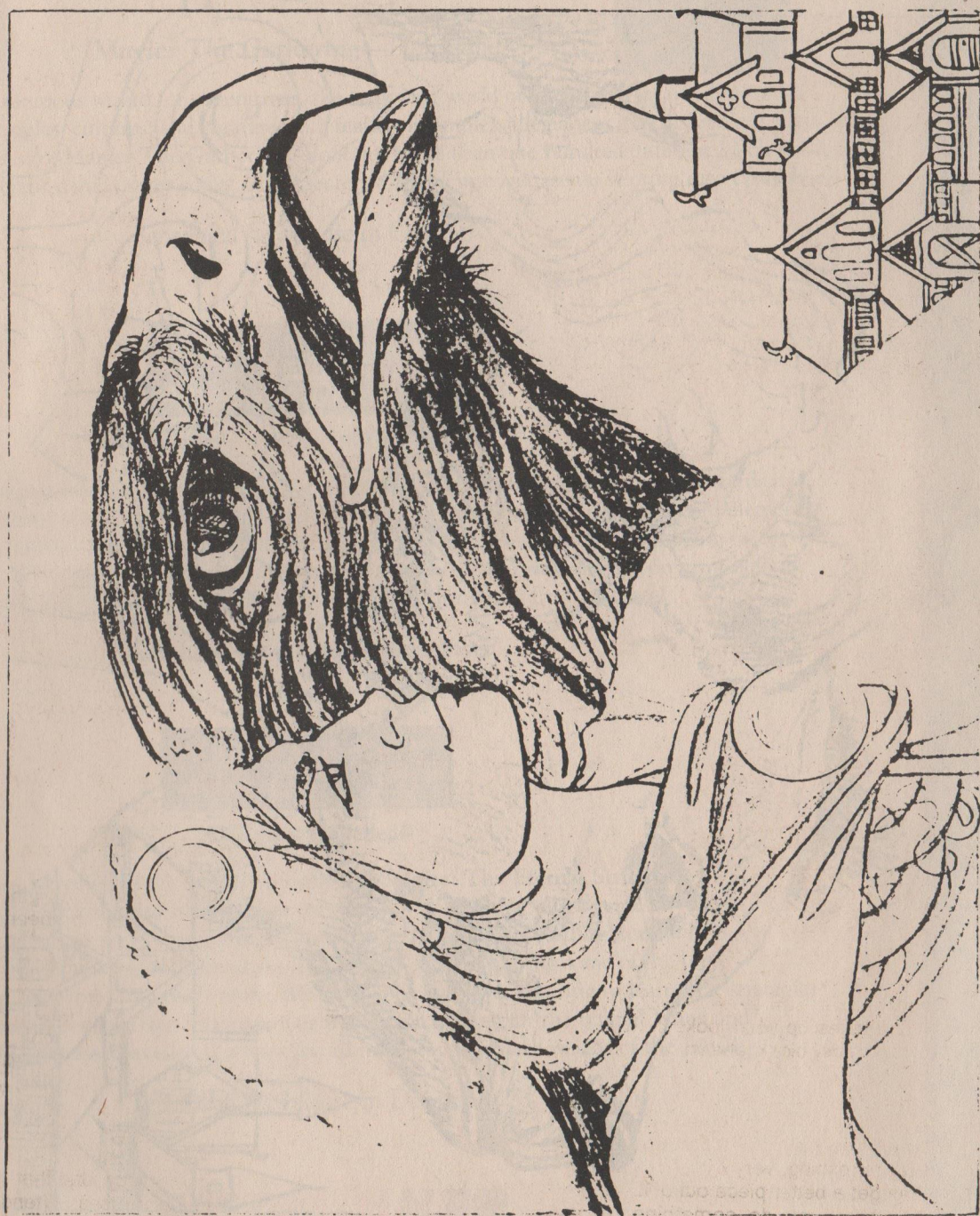
KF: [pause] Well, I'd say that the most valuable strength that I have is that there seems to be something about what I do that makes people really like it. I know there are some people who don't like my work, and that's fine [laughter], but there's something that just seems to inspire a certain amount of affection for it. I don't know what it is, but I hope I can keep it.

I'm getting fairly decent with putting paint on the paper, but I know I have a long way to go. I look at some of the big names in science fiction, artists who are working in the field right now, and they are so polished. Or, for instance, the Pre-Raphaelites, who were working around the Victorian era. They are so polished, and they're so—[sighs]—if I could do that! [laughter] But I can't yet, so I just have to keep practicing.

ST: That word, "yet," is the key!

KF: Oh, yeah! Well, I hope I can do it.

All right, here's a strength. Here's a strength that has been commented upon by an art director that I have a great deal of respect for. He said, "Man, Kaja just has an amazing learning curve! She just keeps getting better so fast! She must draw all the time!" And Phil said, "No, she's really lazy, and she'd probably get a lot better, faster, if she worked harder." Because I *am*, I am very lazy, and that's one of my weaknesses. I [tend to] only take as much work as I need to, and I sit around and read a lot and don't get my work





done as fast as I'd like to, and I don't get as much practice in, so I'm not improving as fast as I'd like to. On the other hand, I'm told that I improve very rapidly.

ST: *What are the steps you go through when you create a Magic card?*

KF: They give you an assignment, you turn in a sketch, and then they either okay it or you turn in another sketch! [laughter] But they usually okay mine, or they make a couple of suggestions. Then I get a piece of illustration board, draw a picture on it, take a photocopy of it so that I have a reference of it in case I lose some of the lines while I'm painting, and then paint it.

ST: *The color of the border on a Magic card can often affect the final look of the painting. Do you take the color of the border into account when you're painting a card?*

KF: If I know it. Sometimes I might. But you don't always know what color it's going to be.

ST: *Have comics been an influence on your artwork?*

KF: Oh yeah. Like I was saying, when I was in high school one of the only comic books I really had seen a lot of was Wendy Pini's *Elfquest*. And I tried to learn how to draw like that, with marginal success. A couple of years before I met Phil, I found Phil's comic work. It's very interesting, because I remember looking at that and thinking, "Wow, this guy's really good. I really like this stuff." And I sat down once and tried to do what I did with Wendy Pini's stuff, where I'd try to draw a picture that looked like the picture in the book. I tried to do that with one of Phil's drawings, and it was just awful and embarrassing and horrible. I remember thinking, "Obviously, this is not something that I can do." So

it was a real shock later when I started going out with Phil, and then everyone started to say that my work looked like his. Before that, none of my friends ever said that. But then I looked at it, and, "Yeah, I see what you mean." But up until then I'd never heard it and it'd never occurred to me.

ST: *Maybe part of it is that within the Magic world, you two are the only ones with that sort of style.*

KF: Maybe. Like I said, I'm trying to get away from that now, and do more of the more "painfully" stuff. People seem to like that, too. Although I have to admit that one of the ones I did for Mirage came out looking awfully "Disney." [laughter]

KF: [through gritted teeth] It sure is, isn't it.

ST: *What's the genesis of that card?*

KF: I didn't know what to do! [laughter] The entire *Antiquities* set...it was the second expansion I worked on. The *Arabian Nights* stuff is right up my alley. I love painting Arabian Nights themes, I love painting African themes, and I love the art from those parts of the world. So I had no trouble with that, that just came right out. But with *Antiquities*, I was still enough of an amateur that I had trouble wrapping my head around the idea. So I had a lot of trouble with those pieces. I had a lot of trouble making them look like anything I was pleased with, and

"I love painting Arabian Nights [and] African themes."

ST: *I'd like to ask you about some specific cards. The Cuombajj Witches. What's the deal with the six-fingered witch?*

KF: Umm...she has six fingers?

ST: *Yeah.* [laughter]

KF: That's about what the deal is! [laughter] I just drew it that way, and kind of stepped back and thought, "Oh, that's cute, whatever." Sometimes when you're drawing, you just draw things, and if you don't like it, you erase it, and if you do like it, you leave it. So she's just a witch, she's got six fingers, what the heck!

ST: *Millstone's an interesting card.*

didn't really succeed on a couple of them. There are a couple of them that I still look at and think, "Oh my God, [these cards have been printed] in Japanese!" [laughter] "Oh, no, what have I done to myself!" [laughter]

ST: *I think Millstone turned out pretty nice.*

KF: People seem to like it, and I'm really glad. It makes me happy that several of those *Antiquities* cards that just make me cringe, people say, "Oh, but I love that card!" And I say, "Thank you, oh God!" [laughter] But that was the expansion that was right in between...well, let me try to put it another way.

Phil tells me that occasionally an amateur artist who finally gets a professional break will freeze, and do just a terrible,

terrible job, even though they've been doing beautiful amateur work. And that's just something that can happen if you get too worked up about it. I think that happened to me, interestingly enough, on my *second* shot at Magic instead of my first shot. I think that after that, I just got over it. I just kind of froze up and panicked on that one set, and then I've been fine ever since. So at least I got over it! That's how I console myself.

ST: *What about Revelation, with the stained glass?*

KF: Well, they gave me Revelation, and...I was raised Lutheran, but I think I'm very Catholic at heart. I just love the whole thing with the Saints and the beautiful churches and all of the history and the art that goes with it. So they gave me Revelation and I thought, "Oh, I want to paint somebody having a revelation! Huzzah!" Then I thought, "Well...this would be interesting." So I did it up like a stained glass window, and I liked it, so I left it that way.

ST: *Then there's Rainbow Vale, where you're doing Maxfield Parrish...*

KF: I love Maxfield Parrish. [laughter] I tried [to mimic him], but it came out more cartoony than I wanted it to. But it's very nice. That's the card that my grandparents like best. [laughter] It turned out very nice.

ST: *One that I never would have guessed was yours if your name hadn't been on it was your Basal Thrull.*

KF: Oh, for heaven's sakes. Yeah...

ST: *That's such a strange card. How did you do that?*

KF: I was trying to do a Heironymous Bosch, again with mixed success. I was trying to

make it a nasty little, creepy, Heironymous Bosch beastie. He came out all right. It gave me the creeps after I finished it, though.

ST: *I guess that's the idea!*

KF: He's kind of horrible. [laughter]

ST: *One of your more interesting Ice Age cards, I think, is Pyroblast, where, again, you're making another artistic allusion with the Oriental dragon background.*

KF: I'm still trying to find my feet. I really am. Look, there they are, right at the end of my legs! [laughter] No, I'm still trying to find my own look, and I like a lot of different styles of art that came before, and I've been learning from them. And I figured we needed some dragons that weren't Western dragons.

ST: *What about the two-card Trade Caravan, which has all of these little things worked into it?*

KF: I have a project that I would dearly love to do someday, [for which] I have some sketches and some written ideas. It's kind of an Arabian Nights caravan, with weird creatures and stuff. Because--maybe you can tell from my work--I love to paint stuff. People in great big gorgeous robes with texture and decorations and ornaments and great big headpieces and earrings and things. That's a project that I've been thinking about for years. [With] Trade Caravan, they gave us a choice out of a whole list of cards, and I said, "Oh, can I do this?" Because this is what I'm thinking about. And, oh man, that thing took forever. I had no idea, it was the first thing I had done with that much detail in it, and it took a large amount of time. I was just having fun painting a weird little caravan and things. I put things all over.

I'm very fond of the big, four-legged spider-thing. That's my favorite thing in that. Although one of my friends likes the troll with the chair on his nose. [laughter]

ST: *Is there anything in general that you'd like to say about your Magic experience?*

KF: It's been a lot of fun, I've really enjoyed it. I heard Phil give you my [comment] before, which is, "I was happy before, and I'm less happy now, but I'm still pretty happy." I know there's a lot of talk going around right now, but my experience has been very positive. I've had a good time.

I always say I'll always work for WotC if they ask me, and I'll always work for Jesper Myrfors if he asks me. Jesper was the first art director that [WotC] had, and he was wonderful. He did a lot for me, and besides that, I just think that he's terrific. So I don't care if [he's] paying or not, if he asks, I'll make time for him.

ST: *What other card sets have you done artwork for?*

KF: XXXenophile, Shadow-fist, and that's about it right now. Those are the big ones.

ST: *What is your contribution to XXXenophile?*

KF: Oh, I'm the wife, I get to boss everybody around, it's great. [laughter] I don't actually officially work for the company. I wander through the offices a lot. I certainly add my opinions, for what they're worth. I did ten pieces, came up with some funny jokes for Phil to paint, helped come up with names. Basically, the involvement that anybody who's always around has. There's nothing I can [point to and] officially say, "I did this!" But I certainly had my fingers in it. But officially, no, I'm just an artist for them. ■





BARON SENGIR PORTRAIT

(UNPUBLISHED)

Homelands

by Steven Tice

The *Homelands* expansion had perhaps the most detailed storyline of any expansion to that point, yet the play quality of the cards has resulted in the set being somewhat controversial. I interviewed *Homelands* designers Kyle Namvar and Scott "Scooter" Hungerford via e-mail for this article. Pete Venters also contributed.

How was Homelands created, from idea stage to final product?

Kyle Namvar: We came up with five main personalities that I made cards for. Then we spent the next year writing a back story to explain the existence of all of the other cards. Then I did the rules text for the cards; that took six months. Then we got some input from Steve Bishop (the director of the Duelist Convocation) and Pete Venters to help flesh out the story and rules. Two years after [coming up with the original] concept, it was on the way to print.

Scott Hungerford: This is a big order, but I'll try to keep it direct and to the point. Kyle Namvar and I were sorting *Antiquities* cards for the Customer Service reference books one afternoon, and got to talking about all the neat cards that absolutely demanded that stories be written about them—where did the Sengir Vampires come from, who or what was Serra, and what were the Hurloon really like? As we sat there talking, we realized that we had a really good idea, and the more we threw ideas back and forth at each other, the more the concept for a Magic: the Gathering

set fleshed out. With each question asked, we intuitively had the answer, and the project started to take on a life of its own.

Over the next few months, we worked on the set anytime we were together with enough time to brainstorm. The foundations of the politics, relationships and personalities of the characters just grew out of nowhere, and very rapidly the simple archetypes we had first developed began to take on bodies and minds. We submitted our work to Wizards of the Coast as "outside designers", and *Homelands* was put up against a number of other sets that were also up for review due to an "empty slot" in the publishing schedule. When the R&D review was completed, *Homelands* came out on top because of its simplicity, keeping to the core rules, and its straightforward mechanics.

The development stage for *Homelands* was brutal. It seemed like we had a new revision due at the end of every week, and the thirty pages of notes on the storyworld (including a particularly vital Denny's restaurant placemat covered with cryptic scribbling) rapidly grew to eighty pages, then a hundred and eighty pages. Characters grew, lands were created, and the card set steadily grew in strength and cohesion. With Kyle's mastery of the game mechanics and his tempering of my rabid creativity, soon we really started to have something that was quality rather than quantity.

Enter the third designer, Steve Bishop of Duelist Convocation fame. He was the final arbitrator on rules in our fledgling tournaments and championships, and Kyle and I decided it would be best if he would go through the set and look for anything that

would cause problems in tournaments, or see if there were any "broken" cards that would otherwise be banned from tournament play. After a couple of weeks of suffering and innumerable in-jokes from Steve (Summon Clam??? Laslodian Constrictor???), most of the bugs were worked out of the card set, and *Homelands* was made much stronger.

Finally, we were coming up on the deadline for the final submission to the R&D Developers, who would decide whether the company was going to accept the final set or drop it. Frantic work ensued, and many long hours were spent after work banging away at the keyboard trying to build the newborn world of Ulgrotha, and the core elements of the background setting and character information for the *Homelands* expansion.

On the final day, it was revealed to Kyle and me by the R&D folks that we needed to redo about thirty cards before deadline for the set to be accepted—in a little under four hours. The two of us, burned out and without a drop of creativity between us from the six-month-long endeavor were just about defeated. By random chance, one of the freelance artists, Pete Venters, wandered in and asked what we were up to. We explained the problem, and the three of us settled down anew and tore down, stripped out and rebuilt a quarter of the card set before the critical 2 P.M. meeting. At 2:10 we sat down with the R&D Developers and watched as they went through the set card by card for nearly three hours, at the end of which we got a thumbs up from the R&D team that the *Homelands* set was accepted!

I served on the *Homelands* project team as a designer liaison, and got to witness the entire production process through team meetings--everything from the art assignments to the packaging production, from sell text through the final advertising images. Since I was only a liaison, I didn't get to see a lot of the work behind the scenes, but I was one of the people who fought the hardest for the name *Homelands* to stay, rather than being renamed with one of the other three hundred plus names that the product team brainstormed.

Why were there no new concepts (like cumulative upkeep) in Homelands?

Kyle: We were not allowed by the Development Department.

Scott: The set was always meant to be simple and straightforward. Being Customer Service reps for Wizards of the Coast, both Kyle and I knew that the simpler the set was, the more the kids would appreciate it. Also, Kyle and I both spent just about every third weekend for a year attending game conventions all over the United States, and literally played thousands of games against all comers. We got a strong feel on what people liked and didn't like about the game of Magic, and designed our set accordingly with what we learned from "the real world". Our set was never designed for the hardcore Magic tournament player, but more for their eight-year-old kid brother who liked to build neat theme decks, or to screw with that hardcore player and make them think about deck construction rather than just playing the same Rack/Vise/Feldon's Cane deck over and over again. There are a lot of new concepts in *Homelands*, but we made one of our goals from the very beginning that there wouldn't be an

additional rules card in every pack, like *Legends*.

Were there any interesting or story-related cards that were eliminated from the final set?

Kyle: About seventy-five cards from *Homelands* will probably never be seen unless we do a new set. I would not mind doing a high-power set.

Scott: Lots. Laslodian Constrictor (the green, landbound counterpart to the Giant Oyster), the Giant Trap Door Spider ended up in *Ice Age* (and our card became Root Spider), a lot of the non-tri-lands like Vesuvia or the Llanowar Forest; Vesuvia was going to be a land that could imitate any other land in play (and thus was completely broken as a card), and the Llanowar Forest was a land you could tap to Summon an Elf for free (like the Didgeridoo) or for a green mana, also a rather broken card. Likely neither will turn up verbatim in any future sets. The Hurloon Minotaurs became the Anaba Minotaurs, the Willow Queen became the Autumn Willow due to the character in the Disney film "Pocahontas"... Out of our whole set, only a handful of cards remained untouched from the beginning, and with us chasing *Fallen Empires* and *Ice Age*, we just about had to rewrite our set every time, because the concepts that came up in the R&D sets made us rewrite our cards in droves.

People were expecting more minotaur cards than actually appeared in the set, particularly since Anaba Ancestor is a ghost and Anaba Bodyguard is a bodyguard. What was the thinking behind this?

Kyle: The [Anaba Ancestor is a] ghost because a dead minotaur can't be a minotaur any more. The Anaba Bodyguard

had forsaken his heritage to live among the humans and orcs, [and had become] hooked on their vices and loyal to their money. They are no longer claimed by the tribes.

Scott: If you have four of each Minotaur, including the Hurloon Minotaur, the Anaba Spirit Crafter, the Anaba Shaman, and the Labyrinth Minotaur, that makes sixteen creatures. For a standard blue-red Minotaur/Lightning Bolt/Counter-spell/Didgeridoo deck, that's just about all you need. As always, there were space considerations, but we wanted to aid the different creature types, not overdo them. I think that the Sengir Family and friends is one of the best theme sets in Magic because of its ties and its diversity, and we didn't overdo it there, either.

Were the tri-lands included in order to encourage people to play with more colors in their decks?

Kyle: Yes, but the cards changed several times in the Development Department.

Scott: From my point of view, yes. Tri-lands make a lot of the three color theme decks feasible, and though they may never win tournaments due to speed problems or the Celestial Prism cost factor, they make casual games very enjoyable, especially for Rabid Wombat decks (Blood Lust, Giant Growth, Feast of the Unicorn) and that kind of thing. They are also good to throw into a deck just on the chance they might come up at an opportune time.

Homelands seems to have been well-received by those who enjoyed the story, but less well-received by those who buy solely for the cards. How do you

feel about the public reaction to Homelands?

Kyle: It was not designed to be a strong tournament set. It was for limited environment, and to hand people cards to get them past some of the same old decks. I feel that *Homelands* is more powerful than people give it credit for.

Scott: We knew from the start, (and especially with the playtester comments) that there would be a lot of controversy between the people who think that *Homelands* sucks rocks, and those who claim that *Homelands* is their favorite expansion of all time. Even a year after the release, the public quorum has yet to make up its mind, and that's fine with me.

Because we wanted to keep the set simple, we knew that the power-gamers would be disappointed because it didn't have any Shivan Moxes or Black Lotus Dragon Engines. But there are a lot more people out there, who will never be tournament players, who enjoy putting together Faerie theme decks, collecting the Sengir Family, or just enjoy frustrating their opponent's Weenie Madness deck with a Lured Ferret set upon mischief and mayhem. *Homelands* was built primarily for the dreamers, and eight-year-olds who have been wanting to trip up the thousand dollar decks with a little ol' Primal Order or a puny Funeral March and a Terror or two.

I know that I will never be acclaimed as the "best designer in Magic," but I do know two things: Richard Garfield told Kyle and me at the release in New York that we had made a fine set, and when we were in Germany the following week, one of the World Champions told us that Joven's Ferrets is one of his favorite cards in Magic. That's enough for me.

How do the following cards fit into the story of Homelands?:

Beast Walkers

Kyle: They're the guardians of the road between white and green.

Scott: The Beast Walkers are people who were given the ability to transform into bears or crows by Feroz's magics, so that they might better defend the folks of Aysen. When endangered, the Beast Walkers can turn into crows and fly to the Aysen Abbey, where they can tell the Falconer everything in bird-tongue.

Broken Visage

Scott: It's one of the nasty spells from Grandmother Sengir's private libraries. The spell was one that was very useful when dealing with large creatures and the doppelgangers that imitate them. Storywise, it is very close to the fairy tale idea of the enchanted mirror that makes an exact double of whatever is reflected in its surface.

Chain Stasis

Scott: It's a spell that the Wizards' School created in order to better keep the Sea between Aysen and the Sengir Villages free of warships or pirate vessels set upon plunder.

Giant Oyster

Kyle: Where do you think Mox Pearls come from?

Scott: It's a perfect, oversized, mundane oyster, from which come the pearls that are perfect for the spells that create the Mox Pearl artifacts. Supposedly, Reveka guards the tomes that hold the knowledge of mak-

ing such a priceless artifact and manasource.

Jinx

Kyle: A freshman spell at the Wizards' School.

Scott: Bad luck, a curse. In gameplay, a way of using land-walk to one's advantage. The card name went through a variety of changes right at the very end, and ended up being called "Jinx" due to the connotations of bad luck and ill fortune.

Mammoth Harness

Scott: The folks that live in Haverford use mammoths to plow the rocky ground, or to pull down the trees that the Autumn Willow deems they may use. The magical Harness is very comparable to tackle and harness used on oxen or other beasts of labor, but it had to be able to fit an animal of any size. Once the Wizards' School got ahold of the spell from the hedge-wizards in Haverford, they got to work on using it against their enemies.

Orcish Mine

Kyle: The Koskun region is riddled with collapsed mines [caused by] the orcs.

Scott: The few tribes of orcs that live in the Koskun Mountains dig through the earth looking for anything they can find. Unfortunately, while they may dig up a variety of good things for trade or sale, they tend to cause cave-ins, destroy whole sections of the underground city due to their haphazard planning, and most importantly screw up the mana channels deep beneath the surface of the mountains so that the land itself becomes dull and unusable to wizards.

Rysorian Badger

Kyle: It is just one of Autumn Willow's little garbage collectors. They collect bones, you see.

Scott: It's a curious beast of great intelligence that lives in the Great Wood. It enjoys collecting any objects, artifacts, corpses, and bones it finds in the forest, and building great underground warrens littered with its morbid and magical treasures. Any wizard who can befriend one of these creatures is likely to gain much wealth and even magical items as long as they can tell the Badger where to find more bones.

Serra Bestiary

Kyle: Due to the decay of the Aysen society, they started to capture sentient beings and put them in the zoo. The art does not really reflect the true nature of the card.

Scott: Among the Serrans and the Samites in Aysen, the Serrans view everything as an us/them, black/white, good/evil paradigm. The Bestiary is part of a larger zoo that the Serrans keep, and anything that does not measure as "human" in their eyes generally gets put into the cages and pens for public viewing. Thus, their wizards made the cages nearly escape-proof.

Is Heart Wolf a joke related to the non-existent but much discussed Throat Wolf card?

Scott: Yep. Originally it was supposed to be the Lesser Throat Wolf but Wizards of the Coast wouldn't let us keep it in the set. [So we decided that] the Heart Wolf is owned by a dwarf named Lestor, and the anagram for Lestor's Heart Wolf

is Lesser Throat Wolf, if I remember right.

Whose idea was it to include a Ferrets card? I myself own a ferret, so I thought it was kind of neat.

Kyle: Mine. I, too, have a ferret, and I thought the power was very appropriate (ever try to catch a ferret that does not want to be caught?).

Scott: Kyle Namvar's, as he owns a really neat ferret named Loki.

Timmerian Fiends: how do they fit into the story, and why include an ante card in the set?

Kyle: The Fiends were there for sealed deck play.

Scott: The Timmerian Fiends belong to a wizard named Timothius, long dead from an era long before the present. He discovered these strange creatures had the ability to travel through a dimension called the Aether, and that they had the ability to temporarily rip their way into a world that the Aether touched upon in order to steal objects they found appealing. As an ante card, it gives the eight-year-old a chance to strike fear into the heart of the Mox/Black Lotus player. ("Hey, mister, don't get angry at me. You're the one who sat down here at my table with the bad attitude and better-than-thou demeanor and demanded to play for ante with your thousand dollar deck against my little deck. But if your deck can't even handle a 1/1 creature, that's your problem. Now, should I take the Ruby Mox, or the Black Lotus, or...")

Winter Sky: what does the card's name have to do with the card's function, and how does it fit into the story?

Kyle: It refers to the unpredictable weather of the Koskun region.

Scott: An abnormally harsh winter or a time of abundance; the climate has been changing steadily, and every passing year brings on the question on whether it will be a good harvest, or whether the winter rains will come two months early this year.

Why include Marjhan, yet another large blue creature?

Kyle: Where do you think Sea Serpents come from?

Scott: Because it seemed like the thing to do. Every set seems to have one bigger; it seemed wrong that we shouldn't have our turn at it... Marjhan was originally called Monstrous Serpent, and was meant to originally be the big daddy of the Sea Serpents on Dominaria, but it was going to be large enough to eat whole boats rather than just bite them. Unfortunately, the *Homelands* story was moved off Dominaria to Ulgrotha, and was renamed due to space considerations on the card; the really weird -1/-1 rules on the cards were made by R&D Development, and not by Kyle and me.

Why all the Clockwork critters?

Kyle: A silly inside joke. I seem to have an aptitude for gizmos, so Scooter wanted to put in Clockwork critters.

Scott: Because it was one of the things that Feroz was good at, and something he could teach to the first members of the Wizards' School without too

much work, as one does not need to *have* magic in order to create clockwork devices, only to *understand* magic. Of course, summoning them and powering them takes a wizard, but an artificer (like Urza and Mishra) doesn't even need to have magic in order to create such marvelous toys.

Is Serrated Arrows a pun related to the quantity of Serra cards in the set?

Scott: Not at all—it was supposed to be called Sawtooth Arrows, but Editing nixed the name.

Whose idea was it to include Dominia-related material in the background of the Grandmother Sengir card?

Scott: You mean the Serra Angel feathers and the Fallen Angel headdresses? Pete Venters was behind that. Grandmother Sengir likes to catch the Serra Angels that the planeswalker Serra lets just out of her sight, and use their feathers for quills and blood for ink for her magical tomes.

What is your favorite Homelands card?

Kyle: Joven's Ferrets.

Scott: Tough call, but I would have to say that for game value, my favorite card is Funeral March. For art value, Chris Rush's Prophecy piece, for it shows what an eight-year-old Ihsan saw as his life's enemy (and was nothing more than a vision of what he would become). For story value, probably Aysen Highway/Truce. Eron the Relentless made a deal with the folk of Aysen, demanding that as long as they fed his people, he would keep his people from attacking the low-

lands. In exchange for this, he gave them the Kobold spell Aliban's Tower. The Aysen folks used this spell to grow towers, pull them down through the aid of convict labor-gangs, and build great cobbleroads that connect the hundred towns of Aysen, and even the road between their capital city and long-away Haverford, from the tower rubble. Cobbleroads are great, don't you think?

What kinds of errors did the Continuity Department have to fix for Homelands?

Pete: Well, to fill people in more on the background to my involvement with *Homelands*, while I was over in Seattle and had managed to land the painting assignment of the family Sengir, I was also working on Continuity things with John Tynes, and I asked if I could read the *Homelands* backstory document (yes, the 80 to 120 page one!). I actually read the mammoth file on the plane to New York's Encounters 95, and started making notes in the margins about problems I could see. In the end I talked these problems through with Kyle, Scott, and John, and I helped Scooter to rewrite the backstory. I also got to add a couple of cards to the set. Don't ask what they were; it was a very hectic time and I've completely forgotten!

The kind of Continuity errors I found in the *Homelands* story were the most common types of continuity errors: cause-and-effect. There was a case of the Wizards' School being established twenty years before the incident that was meant to have prompted their creation. Essentially, the effect was happening before the cause. Though this is an unusually extreme error, when you're dealing with the great weave of stories that is Dominia it can happen quite often. Usually, cause-and-effect errors are more a case of bad

conception of secondary effects. People do A to cause B, but they don't take into account side effects C, D, and E. That's a pretty simplistic description, but what it means is that if left unchecked, events can happen and the motive for that event is no longer accurate, or possible. Sheesh, its tough to explain, but that's what I do.

I've been involved with creating stories (in the form of comics books that I drew) since the age of four, and I have a pretty good knack at tracking all the loose threads in a story. Hopefully my work strengthens the stories we put out, and rather than ignoring contradictions, creates imaginative answers to why both facts are true... such as "How many fingers does a Minotaur have?" The answer? Well, the Hurloon and Anaba have four fingers and one thumb, while the Mirtiin, Stahaan, Talruum and most any other Minotaurs have four fingers, all of which have extra joints that allow them to act opposably to each other. The reason for this is buried in the distant past and involves the transportation of the Hurloon to Ulgrotha (*Homelands'* plane), their eventual escape back to Dominaria, the few who stayed behind to become the Anaba, and the Hurloon's eventual return to Stahaan where they were cast out as heretics. The Hurloon began an exodus which led them to the monstrous mountain chain that in current day Dominaria is named for them: the Hurloon Mountains. That's a very short breakdown of the story, and it doesn't even tell you what happened to change the Minotaurs' hands. Eventually we'll put the full story into print, but there are some clues tucked away in the *Ashes of the Sun* novel.■

WEREWOLF SELF-HEALING DRAGON STORM SUSAN VAN CAMP



FROM DRAGON STORM
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Susan Van Camp

by Steven Tice

Susan Van Camp has been illustrating Magic cards since the *Arabian Nights* expansion set, and has contributed artwork to a number of other trading card games. Earlier this year she unveiled *Dragon Storm*, a role-playing/card game hybrid, which has been met with an enthusiastic response. This interview was conducted via e-mail.

What prompted you to create your own card game?

I'd actually been trying to create this game, in one form or another, for more than fifteen years. It didn't start out as a card game; I attempted to design a simplified role-playing game as a book-based system several times. Somehow, book-based systems never got at what I was after.

Then card games came out, and it occurred to me to combine cards with the system I'd been working on. It was a perfect fit. The game did just what I wanted it to; it kept the mechanics and flavor of role-playing, but it was easy to learn, quick to play, and didn't require dozens of rulebooks.

*Who is *Dragon Storm* intended to appeal to?*

Well, just about everyone, but there are a couple of groups I especially wanted to reach. The first group was people like me: Adults who enjoy role-playing but just don't have the time anymore. When I was running book-based role-playing games, I found it took a minimum of two hours to prepare an adventure, and often longer

than that if I wanted to do the job right. Generating stats for people and creatures was incredibly time-consuming, and I had to come up with a scenario on top of that. Eventually, I had to give it up; I know few people over the age of sixteen who have that kind of time available to design a single scenario. Besides, it was an awful lot of work to do [just] to prepare for a single night's play. This game appeals to people like me who love classic role-playing, but need to be able to prepare for it quickly. With this system, it rarely takes me more than fifteen minutes to lay out an adventure which plays out in three to four hours. Role-playing is accessible again, and it's fun.

That brings me to the other group of people I want to reach with this game. When I was running book-based systems, I found it harder and harder to convince new people to try the games. The games coming out were getting more complex every year, and all those books intimidated people. They'd look at a character sheet with more lines to fill out than an income tax form and say, "No, I'd rather not." This game can reach those people. I know; I've watched it happen at conventions I've attended this year. People who have never role-played before have sat down, created a character in less than fifteen minutes, and run in an adventure. And they've had a lot of fun doing it.

*How did you go about locating artists to contribute artwork to *Dragon Storm*?*

I have been networking with other artists for years. The same goes for Mark Poole, another Magic artist and a friend of

mine. Mark called artists we knew and asked if they'd be willing to do the work; we were fortunate, because most of them said yes, and we ended up with some really beautiful artwork.

*Did you design *Dragon Storm* yourself, or did you hire someone to determine the game mechanics?*

Yes, for real and for true, I did design this game. I have the playing cards, scrawled card names, and numbers from when I was first roughing out the system. My husband, Mark Harmon, did help develop the idea after I started work on it; in particular, he helped me figure out the formulas for developing card values. But the concept, and the rules, are my design.

What was it like inking a story in Phil Foglio's XXXenophile comic book?

It was a lot of fun. Phil is one of the best cartoonists in the business, and I've always enjoyed his work. I've got every issue of XXXenophile, and I'm looking forward to the next one.

Why the floating head motif in so many Magic cards?

Because it works. When a piece of art gets reduced that small, it loses detail. I've seen beautiful paintings reduced to visual oatmeal when reduced to the size they need to be on cards. The floating head gives the eye a relatively large focus, which shows up when the art is reduced. Then the viewer's eye can travel around the piece and appreciate the detail, rather than get lost in it.

What Magic cards are you most proud of?

Hymn to Tourach is my favorite. It's a dark, moody piece, unlike most of the stuff I do, but it works. I also like Willow Faerie (male version).

What Magic Card posed the greatest artistic challenge to render?

Actually, it wasn't one, but five. In the *Legends* set, I was asked to do five Glyphs. They were all abstract symbols: One for life, one for destruction, one for illusion, etc. So here I was, on a tight deadline, trying to come up with a symbol for life that didn't have any known religious or cultural ties. It was a very philosophical moment. In the end, I asked my subconscious, which came up with answers like, "Life is a circle with two squiggly things inside of it!" It didn't make a lot of sense, but came out looking fine on the painting.

How does doing card game artwork differ from other projects you've worked on?

Actually, it wasn't as different as you might expect. Before Magic, I'd trained myself to work small, because I sold a lot of paintings at science fiction conventions, and small pieces are desirable in these shows. I've heard a lot of artists talk about the problems with doing pieces 8" by 10", but for me, that size is actually a little bigger than a lot of the work I've done.

What do you particularly enjoy about doing card artwork?

I like the freedom. I've had some assignments where the job was defined down to the last button on a character's shirt and

the number of freckles on his nose. An assignment [like that is] so over-defined that I start to feel like I'm expected to be a photocopier, putting in no artistic input of my own, just producing exactly what I'm asked. Card art hasn't been like that. I've been given freedom to interpret what I'm illustrating, and I do my best work under those circumstances.

How do you go about creating a Magic card? What are the steps involved?

Like most work I do, there's a sketch step, a revisions step, and a painting step. First I get the description and do the initial sketch. This is sent to the art director for approval. If any changes need to be made, I redo the sketch and send it to the art director again. Only after the art director has given me the go-ahead do I actually paint the piece and send it in to the publisher.

The color of the border can often affect the final look of the painting. do you take the color of the card into account when painting a card?

I try to, when I know what the color of the border is going to be. In some cases, I didn't know what color card I was doing until the piece was printed.

What artwork were you inspired by?

I am most inspired by Renaissance art of Europe, especially Da Vinci and Michelangelo. I believe that was art at its best: painting meant to serve and be viewed by the community, but also serving the needs and vision of the artist. I have also always been impressed by the sheer skill of the artists of that period, who pretty much in-

vented perspective, realistic anatomy, and the modern rule of composition.

Please explain the genesis behind the following cards, which are among your best and most interesting Magic cards:

Hymn to Tourach

Wizards called, on a very short deadline, and asked for this card. The description was terse: "It's a black card, and evil priests are casting a spell." As I've said, I do my best work when given freedom to interpret the illustration, and I got a boatload of wiggle room on this one. The wolf's head image came up because I'd been itching to do another wolf since Wyluli Wolf, and it fit well with the nightmare imagery of the work.

Vodalian Knight

This one was a simple, bold image. The background was left out so that the round, flowing lines could carry the piece. I also like the solution I came up with on how to seat a mermaid on a seahorse: she's riding side-saddle.

Faerie Noble and Veldrane of Sengir

While I was sketching these pieces, I looked at them and realized both the Noble and Veldrane had long, narrow faces and eye patches. I decided they must be brothers who had quarreled and gotten into a sword fight (hence, the missing eyes). Afterwards they had gone their separate ways, one to follow the light and one to fall into darkness. Of course, this has nothing to do with the actual mythos of the *Homelands* set...

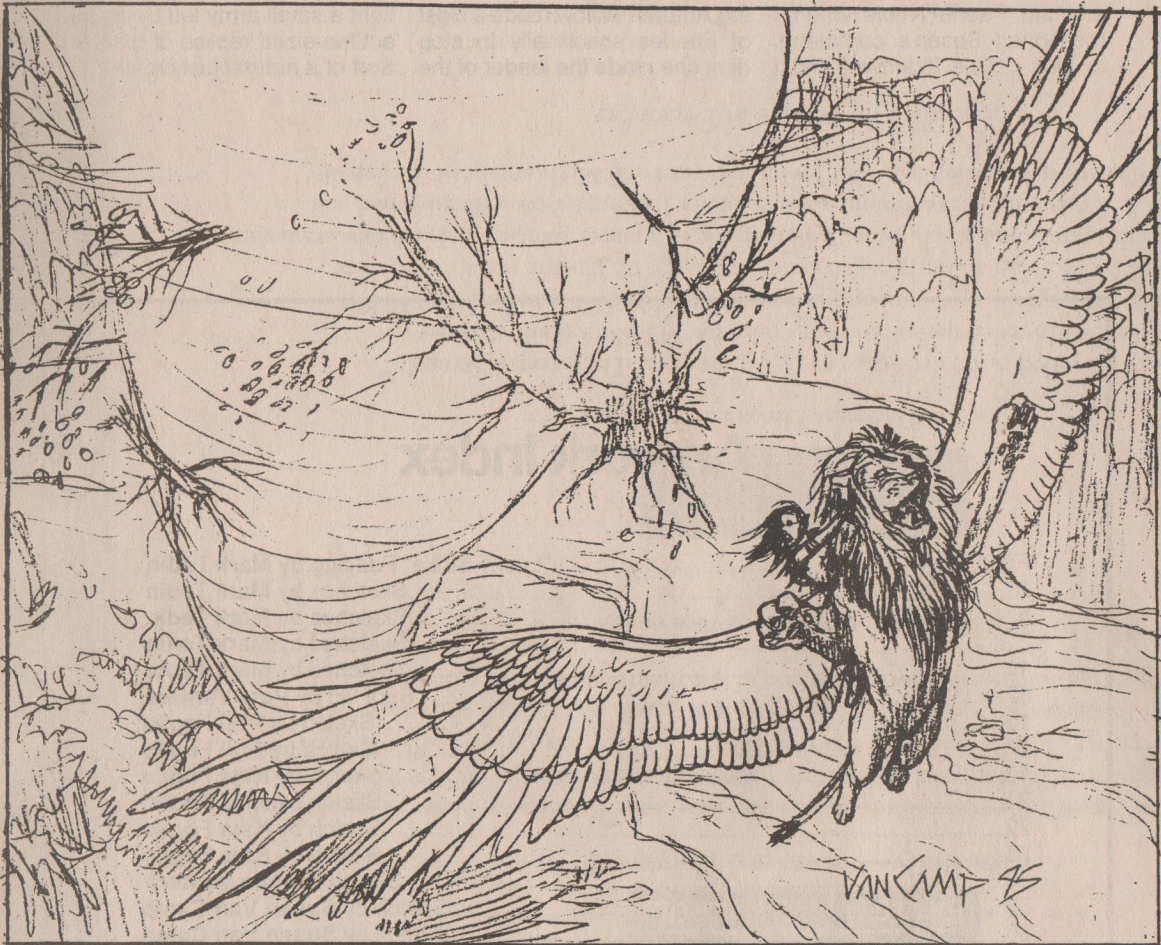
[Editor's Note: Here's what *Homelands* designer Scott Hungerford had to say about the resemblance between Veldrane and the Faerie Noble when I mentioned Susan's comments to him: "Kyle [Namvar] and I

noticed that, too, and we figured that Veldrane had been invading the Great Wood on a regular basis for some time, and when the Autumn Willow made a Host of Faeries specifically to stop him, she made the leader of the

Fae Host look just like Veldrane, as a sort of practical joke at Veldrane's expense. Imagine his surprise at being forced to fight a small army led by an exact fae-sized replica of himself! Sort of a natural justice, eh?"]

Artwork Index

Front Cover.....	"Lucky Strike" Painting by Mark Tedin
2.....	Sketches by Mark Tedin
5.....	Sketches by Mark Tedin
7.....	Sketches by Mark Tedin
10.....	Sketches by Mark Tedin
12.....	Spot Illo by Pete Venters
15.....	Sketch by Phil Foglio
17.....	Sketch by Phil Foglio
18.....	Sketch by Kaja Foglio
21.....	Sketch by Kaja Foglio
22.....	Sketch by Kaja Foglio
25.....	Sketch by Kaja Foglio
26.....	Sketch by Pete Venters
32.....	Sketch by Susan Van Camp
36.....	Sketch by Susan Van Camp
39.....	Sketch by Susan Van Camp
41.....	Spot Illo by Pete Venters
42.....	Painting by Ken Meyer, Jr.
45.....	Sketch by Ken Meyer, Jr.
47.....	Painting by Ken Meyer, Jr.
48.....	Sketch by Susan Van Camp
50.....	Spot Illo by Pete Venters
52.....	Sketch by Pete Venters
55.....	Sketch by Pete Venters
58.....	Sketch by Susan Van Camp
63.....	Spot Illo by Pete Venters
64.....	Sketch by Susan Van Camp
Back Cover.....	"Arctic Conjuror" Painting by Mark Tedin



TORNADO Susan VinCamp

FROM MAGIC-ALLIANCES BOOSTER

DEAR SANDRA:
 HERE THEY ARE, ON THE TWO 'NETAR OF THE WOODS' PIECES,
 THE BACKGROUNDS WILL BE GREY AND FOGGY, ON VARCHILO'S
 WARRIDERS, THE SKY BEHIND THE VILLAGE IS FILLED WITH
 SMOKE AND ORANGE FLAMES,

TALK TO YOU SOON,

SUE

Alliances

by Steven Tice

Here's the story behind this summer's wildly popular *Alliances* expansion. I interviewed *Alliances* designers Skaff Elias and Jim Lin, and *Alliances* developers Mark Rosewater and Scott Hungerford, for this article. Pete Venters also contributed to this article.

What was the primary design goal of Alliances?

Skaff Elias: The primary goal was to produce a great expansion set—one which players enjoyed and one which also changed the environment.

Jim Lin: The primary design goal of *Alliances* was to provide a good set to complement *Ice Age*. Other than that, we looked to shake up the environment a little by doing some cards that were good against some of the prevalent strategies we saw, such as discard and creatureless. In addition, we decided to put some fixed versions of old spoilers in.

Why the large concentration of power cards in Alliances?

Skaff: Actually, it's not clear that *Alliances* has a lot of power cards, just a lot of cards people believe to be powerful. The set has very few cards that you can immediately say are useless, and the drawbacks to a lot of the cards are subtle. Actually, *Alliances* probably has a lot of well-balanced, useful cards, but not many "power" cards.

Jim: I don't think that there are "power" cards in *Alliances* in that I expect few if any of the

Alliances cards to be restricted in Type II. The main reason there are so many quality cards is that we finally had enough playtest time to really work [on the] cards and make sure that they were balanced, rather than having to take a conservative approach on cards that weren't playtested enough.

Mark Rosewater: Magic R&D has gone through some major transition in the last year. *Alliances* is the first project that most of us new guys did development on. It is generally the feeling of the current Magic R&D team that expansions need to include many things. Among the list is cards that are viable for tournament play. As tournament play requires cards that are a touch above average, one of the things we were very conscious of was making sure that the set had cards that we felt would be desired in each of the tournament settings (including Type I, incidentally).

Why are most of the artifact creatures so wimpy? They either have drawbacks much worse than any of the benefits of using the card (Soldevi Steam Beast, Phyrexian War Beast), or work in such a way as to make them rarely useful (Phyrexian Devourer).

Skaff: We have consistently undercosted artifact creatures in the past. Colors that are supposed to be creature-weak should not be able to pick up good artifact creatures without having to think hard about the consequences, or else what does it mean for a color to be creature-weak? *Alliances* moves artifact creatures in the direction we'd like to see them go.

Jim: In general, artifact creatures need to be worse than creatures in the predominant creature colors such as green, since any color can play them. Otherwise blue/white decks that are partially balanced on their inability to field very many power creatures would simply romp.

Mark: For starters, the Phyrexian War Beast (and to a lesser extent the Soldevi Steam Beast) is an excellent sealed deck card. The reason that none of the artifact creatures are too powerful in constructed decks is that we want to keep the balance in the set. Since certain colors are supposed to be disadvantaged by the weakness of their creatures, we have to be careful with artifact creatures so as not to fill in that gap. If blue, for example, could supplement all its creatures with artifact creatures, then blue would lose the creature weakness endemic to its color. For this reason, we have to make the artifact creatures either a little weaker or more specialized so as to not upset the balance.

Library manipulation is one of the major card themes of Alliances. Was this a conscious effort to create a large shift in the way the game is played?

Skaff: We always liked library manipulation cards because of the strategic element they add, but have in the past not been able to balance them well. *Alliances* shows a reattempt at this.

Jim: It was more of a conscious decision to explore a theme that we felt was extremely interesting and had not had much done with it before.

Why Gorilla cards? Just on a whim?

Skaff: This is really a question for Dominia Continuity people. We picked up on that part of their backstory because we had gorillas in *Ice Age*, and no gorillas really in the set, so we wondered where they came from, and had a little fun.

Jim: This was one of the themes proposed in an early writeup of the story by Continuity. We decided to have a little fun with them, so we just latched onto gorillas and went crazy.

Mark: This was just an in-joke. Continuity had written some preliminary backstory that had intelligent apes in it, and the joke sort of spun out of control from there.

Pete Venters: Just to clarify about the gorilla theme...it was built to joke with Continuity about an early draft of the story. Continuity at that time was actually just John Tynes. John worked as the Continuity man for most of the first half of 1995. Before he left the company in July 1995 (to go to Daedalus), he had taken on Scott Hungerford as his assistant, and I joined the ranks one week before he left--although our paths did cross earlier, as Tynes and I did a lot of brainstorming on various cultures within Dominia, and so I was actually a little more advanced than Scott when I started full time. When we got to the *Alliances* set, which at that time was codenamed "Quack," Scott and I rewrote the story, sidelining the gorillas to a minor but relevant episode with the elves.

Was the inclusion of the Guerilla Tactics card a joke on the part of the Alliances designers, playing on the Gorilla cards?

Scott Hungerford: Oh, yes, it was. Other amusing card names from the very first pre-playtest alpha set of *Alliances* included Nibble of Gorilla, Gorilla Zombie, Flying Poisonous Gorilla, Ashes to Gorillas, Monkeyshines, Bedtime for Bonzo and even Time Machine of the Apes. Even the slightest mention of gorillas makes me have minor spasms of apprehension, as the week that Continuity worked on naming and clarifying all of the *Alliances* cards was probably the most frustrating week of creativity I have ever had.

A lot of Alliances cards are so powerful as to seem to be real candidates for banning or restriction in tournament play. Yet Alliances reportedly had more preparatory lead time than any other set, so that any such cards could be weeded out. What is your assessment of this situation? Do you believe that these cards are less powerful than they at first appear to be?

Skaff: We'll have to wait and see.

Jim: I believe that few if any of the *Alliances* cards will be banned or restricted in Type II, with maybe a couple restricted in Type I, although even that is not clear. Many of the cards seem great at first blush, but do end up being balanced in the end.

Mark: I think you will find that a minimal number of *Alliances* cards will need to be banned or restricted. This isn't to say that you won't see many of them becoming staples in tournament play, just they aren't quite as broken as people seem to initially feel.

Why the Phelddagrif, a green-winged, flying, purple hippo? Is there some sort of in-joke there, besides the anagrammatical name?

Jim: This was actually our original name for Freyalise, but we were informed that it didn't sound like a nature goddess, but more like a flying, purple hippo. Since we really liked the name, we decided to create a flying, purple hippo for *Alliances*.

Mark: It's just a little tribute to Richard [Garfield]. He had never been mentioned on a card before and the *Alliances* designer and developers thought it was about time. A little trivia note: Phelddagrif was originally going to be the goddess of spring in *Ice Age* (later to be renamed Freyalise). But Continuity said the name sounded like a flying, purple hippo. See what happens when you try to make a joke around here?

Was there a design intention to encourage people to play larger decks by including a lot of cards that gain their power by removing library cards from the game?

Skaff: Well, we thought it might be interesting to challenge people's basic assumptions about the game, like "how many cards do I play?"

Jim: We thought it would be interesting to make this at least an option for people, rather than always playing exactly sixty-card decks.

How do you feel about the rousing reception Alliances has received, and do you think that this will result in WotC producing more sets like Alliances in the future?

Skaff: We love the reception and are thankful! Hopefully we will be producing more sets like

VARCHILD'S WARRIDERS - SUSAN VAN CAMP



FROM MAGIC-ALLIANCES BOOSTER

Alliances in the future, whatever that means exactly.

Jim: I am proud and happy that *Alliances* was received so well, and I expect future sets to be as good if not better. We've really got an amazing R&D crew working on Magic these days, so I only see things getting better.

Mark: As I said above, *Alliances* is ushering in a new era of Magic R&D folk. Expect the same quality and card power level in *Mirage*.

Why weren't there more cards designed to make use of snow-covered lands?

Skaff: The snow-covered land concept was interesting exclusively in *Ice Age*-only play. It's been over a year since the release of *Ice Age*.

Jim: We did a few more cards to deal with snow-covered lands, but in the end I guess that snow-covered lands was an interesting idea that just never really clicked.

Mark: Let's just say that cumulative upkeep and cantrips were the concepts that the *Ice Age* designers want to be remembered for.

How do you feel now about the concepts that originated with Ice Age, such as cumulative upkeep, and have the cards been used as much or as little as you expected them to be?

Skaff: The cumulative upkeep cards were used a little less than we expected, we probably need to up their power relative to cost a bit in the next go-around.

Jim: I think that cumulative upkeep is a great idea, and I hope to see it used in future

sets. Some of the original cumulative upkeep cards weren't used as much as we hoped, I think due to too little playtest time. However, I see this problem being fixed in the future.

Mark: Both cumulative upkeep and cantrips have become standard tools for card design. This speaks high praise for the *Ice Age* designers.

Since the Alliances cards were created before being made part of the Dominia storyline, how was this meshing of disparate elements accomplished?

Pete: Well, the designers didn't even give us summon lines, so we created those, too. In truth, a lot of cards get created that don't necessarily have a strong tie to the storyline. The story is the primary focus, but the cards also include snapshots from outside that create a wider world view with tantalizing glimpses into the rest of the world. A lot of story construction occurs after the card sets are well underway; retro-fitting and shaping the story to match the needs of the card set are part of the job.

Scott: We received a [group] of cards from the designers without real titles, story foundations or even summon lines—just card powers that were yet to be playtested—and had to cobble the whole thing together in just a few days from scratch. We had a really hard time creating *Alliances* (as it was my first time as story process coordinator). But it was valuable because it was a worst case scenario, with little time and little resources, and the experience made *Mirage* seem like eating a handful of sweets on a summer day. Thankfully, John Tynes and I worked out the foundations of the *Alliances* story during his last days here, and when Venters came on shortly after

Tynes was hired onto Daedalus games, he brought new perspective and his manic wit into play, and Continuity just went from there!

Unlike Homelands, there seems to be no single, coherent storyline to Alliances. Who was responsible for creating a story out of these cards?

Pete: *Alliances* is actually several stories occurring in Terisiare at roughly the same time in history (a span of three years). Scott Hungerford and I were the primary creators of the storyline, building on the skeletal concepts left behind by departing Continuity Editor John Tynes, and the occasional embellishment from Shawn Carnes (that's when he wasn't falling asleep on my "couches of doom!").

What is the story behind the Keeper of Tresserhorn?

Pete: When Lim Dul left for Shandalar (as seen in *Acclaim's* comics), he left his keep, known as Tresserhorn, in the hands of his undead servants. The absolute ruler of the keep was the Lord of Tresserhorn, answerable only to Lim Dul himself. Below the Lord were four Keepers. The Keepers are the lieutenants of the Lord and are responsible for maintaining the Keep and controlling the undead within (such as Lim Dul's High Guard).

Do you feel that the more precise demands of Continuity for Magic now are too restrictive of the creativity of the artists? How specific are the instructions for the illustrations for a set like Alliances?

Pete: Yes, the artwork created isn't as free and easy as it used to be. The demands of unifying the intellectual property and making Dominia make at least a modicum of sense has required that we get firmer on what can and can't exist. I write the art descriptions, and as a fellow Magic artist, I try to keep a balance between the required info and leaving as much room for creativity as possible. I strongly want there to be room for wild creativity, but frankly, there's still plenty of room for interpretation in the tightest of art briefs. Here's one of the tightest from *Alliances*, a description of

Kaysa, who had already appeared in the Acclaim comics:

"The present day elder druid, spiritual leader of the elves, the Juniper Order, and a small band of Kjeldorans. She is a lean figure of roughly 35 years with dark circles under her eyes. She is prone to wearing a hood concealing her grey hair and high hairline. At the base of the front of her neck she sports a crescent moon birthmark. This birthmark is very important. Woodland scene preferable."

As you see, its pretty exacting, but certainly not a creative shackle.

Secondly, *Alliances* may have seemed very humanocentric. Well, that was the point. It was the tale of real people attempting to survive a very trying time without the aid of Planeswalkers or (too many) fantastic beasts...and, no, the Phelddagrif did not actually exist on Terisiare, it was actually a children's story whose mythological belief grew to the point that mages could create the creatures solely by envisioning them. So the occasional mage was able to summon it, but it never truly existed as anything but a magical construct. ■

ORC FROM 'SPOILS OF WAR' SPOT ILLO SKETCH





Ken Meyer, Jr.

Ken Meyer, Jr. has worked in comics and illustration for several years. Magic players know him primarily for his *Ice Age* cards and the *Ernham Djinn*. This interview was conducted by phone in July, 1996.

Steven Tice: Which Magic cards are you most proud of?

Ken Meyer, Jr.: Well, I just did a whole bunch of cards for *The Sabbat*, the new Vampire expansion that Wizards is doing, and there's a bunch of cards in it that turned out really good. If you want an existing card that's already out, there are a couple of Vampire cards... Helena Casimir. And *Ernham Djinn* [for Magic] turned out really good. That was one that I didn't really use any models for, so for something like that it turned out pretty good, too.

ST: For something like *Kird Ape*, it looks like you used a photograph—

KM: Oh, yeah. I went through some *National Geographic*s. I think I actually had someone once tell me they found that exact photograph. [laughter]

ST: Which Magic cards are you least proud of, that didn't quite turn out right?

KM: Well, it's funny, because one that I remember not thinking was that great is *Snow Devil* in *Ice Age*. And *Formation*, that's also in *Ice Age*. I didn't like them that much, but I've actually had some people tell me that those two they liked a lot. So you never know what people are going to like.

ST: I think *Clairvoyance* is one of your best from *Ice Age*.

KM: Thanks. Yeah, that's also one that people have pointed out that they liked. And the bad thing is that I can't sell the original, because part of it was watercolor, but the woman's face in that was done on the computer, so there's no real original to speak of.

ST: That's interesting!

KM: Yeah, I've done a few cards on the computer, but only one is out there now, *Clairvoyance*. I think there's two in *The Sabbat* series that are done on the computer.

ST: It seemed to me that your *Ice Age* cards were in some ways more adventurous than your *Arabian Nights* cards...

KM: That's interesting. I don't know if I would put it that way. It's kind of hard to gauge. *Arabian Nights* was the first gaming art for card games that I had ever done, and I had no idea what Wizards of the Coast was. I even spelled the name wrong, I was so clueless about all that stuff back then.

It might be because there were more *Ice Age* cards than there were *Arabian Nights*, and the subject matter might have been a little out there, too.

ST: Which Magic card posed the greatest artistic challenge to render?

KM: [pause] I think the *Arabian Nights* ones. Except for *Kird Ape* and *Abu Ja'Far*, they were all out of my head. So they were probably the hardest ones because I didn't really have any opportunity to use a model and to experiment with lighting and stuff like that, which is what I usually like to do. (You see that

on the Vampire cards, they're all really realistic, and the lighting's all horror film lighting. That's fun to do). So I think, for that reason, the *Arabian Nights* were the hardest. *Ernham Djinn* was relatively difficult, and *Guardian Beast*—*Guardian Beast* wasn't difficult, really, but it was one that I had to more or less make up, so it sort of comes off, from my eyes, almost looking like a painted cartoon, as opposed to a realistic thing. Whereas someone just looking at it as an illustration probably wouldn't think that, because they don't know what goes into it.

ST: How does doing card game artwork differ from other projects you've worked on?

KM: Well, the most obvious difference is the size of the original, of course, because it's reproduced so small. Some of the originals I've done for some card games are as small as four or five inches square. They're usually bigger than that, maybe nine inches tall by seven inches wide, or something like that. So they're different in that way. They're also a little simpler, because most of the ones that I've done have been portrait cards. So I find someone I think fits the character, take some photographic reference, and paint from that. And [when] they have backgrounds, more often than not they're hazy, watercolor-effects backgrounds, which are pretty easy to pull off. Conversely, ones like *Theromakarst*, *Word of Blasting*, and *Mystic Remora* are things that aren't out of my head, so I have to find references on places. So they can be a little bit more difficult.

ST: *What would you say are your strengths and weaknesses as an artist?*

KM: Well, I would say my strengths are...within the comics field, I do pretty good layouts, and my pencils are all right, but my inks aren't that strong. As far as the gaming world, I'd say that in general I can capture likenesses really well, and I can usually set a mood pretty well. That's partly because I use models and lighting and stuff to set it up ahead of time. Conversely, I don't draw out of my head as well as I should. I've come to rely on photographs too much lately, I think, and I'm trying to do more stuff out of my head. But it's difficult once you fall into that trap of using photographs a lot, it's very easy to just do that. So I need to try to do a bit less of that.

ST: *How do you go about creating a Magic card? What are the steps for that?*

KM: Sometimes they'll give me a pretty detailed description. In the case of the Vampire cards, [the description] will usually have a name, and the sex of the character, and maybe the clan that they belong to, though that doesn't necessarily mean much to me. Most of the time their descriptions are pretty small because they want the artist to have as much free reign as possible. So I'll get that information from them. Then, in the case of the really realistic ones, I'll think of a model I used before. Or I might ask friends if they have friends that like doing this sort of thing. [Then I] take a bunch of photographs, and either match the character to the photographs that I've already shot, or ahead of time I'll know what a character's supposed to look like and I'll ask the person to bring some clothing or jewelry or whatever that they think would be interesting, and use that. I shoot the photographs

with the lighting that I want. Then I just use that as the basis for the painting, and pencil it out. Sometimes I'll change things, add things or subtract things, or change the composition somewhat. [Finally, I] do the penciling and the painting. I use watercolors for most of my work.

ST: *What if it's something like Aurochs from Ice Age—*

KM: [laughs] Yeah!

ST: *—where it's this ancient animal...*

KM: Yeah, stuff like that is a little more difficult. What I actually did in that case, if I remember right, is that I knew the general type of animal that it was. It was sort of like a water buffalo, and I looked through a bunch of magazines (*National Geographic* and stuff like that). And I actually found an animal that was pretty close. What I did, if I remember right, was change a water buffalo of some type, or a buffalo. I made the hair longer, changed the horns a little bit, and I might have changed the coloring somewhat.

ST: *In a recent issue of National Geographic, they had an artist's rendition of an aurochs...*

KM: Really? When they told me the name of this beast and what it was, I didn't even know it was a real thing. I don't even know if they told me if it was a real creature.

ST: *Yeah, I didn't know either until I saw it in National Geographic!*

KM: I think that they might have told me it was a real thing, and I went and looked in books and tried to find some kind of an idea of what it really looked like, but I never could really find anything. Sometimes you just have to hope that what you're doing is

going to be what it actually is, and hope that nobody can find a reference that proves you wrong. [laughter]

ST: *I imagine Thermokarst was another interesting one to try to conceptualize?*

KM: Yeah. If I remember right, Thermokarst is a kind of granite that's found in caves. In my files I actually had a bunch of photographs of caves, and I found one that I thought was kind of neat. Then I wanted to have some kind of people in there, so I put those...somebody actually thought that was the Predator or something, that figure in there, but it was just supposed to be sort of a Neanderthal man.

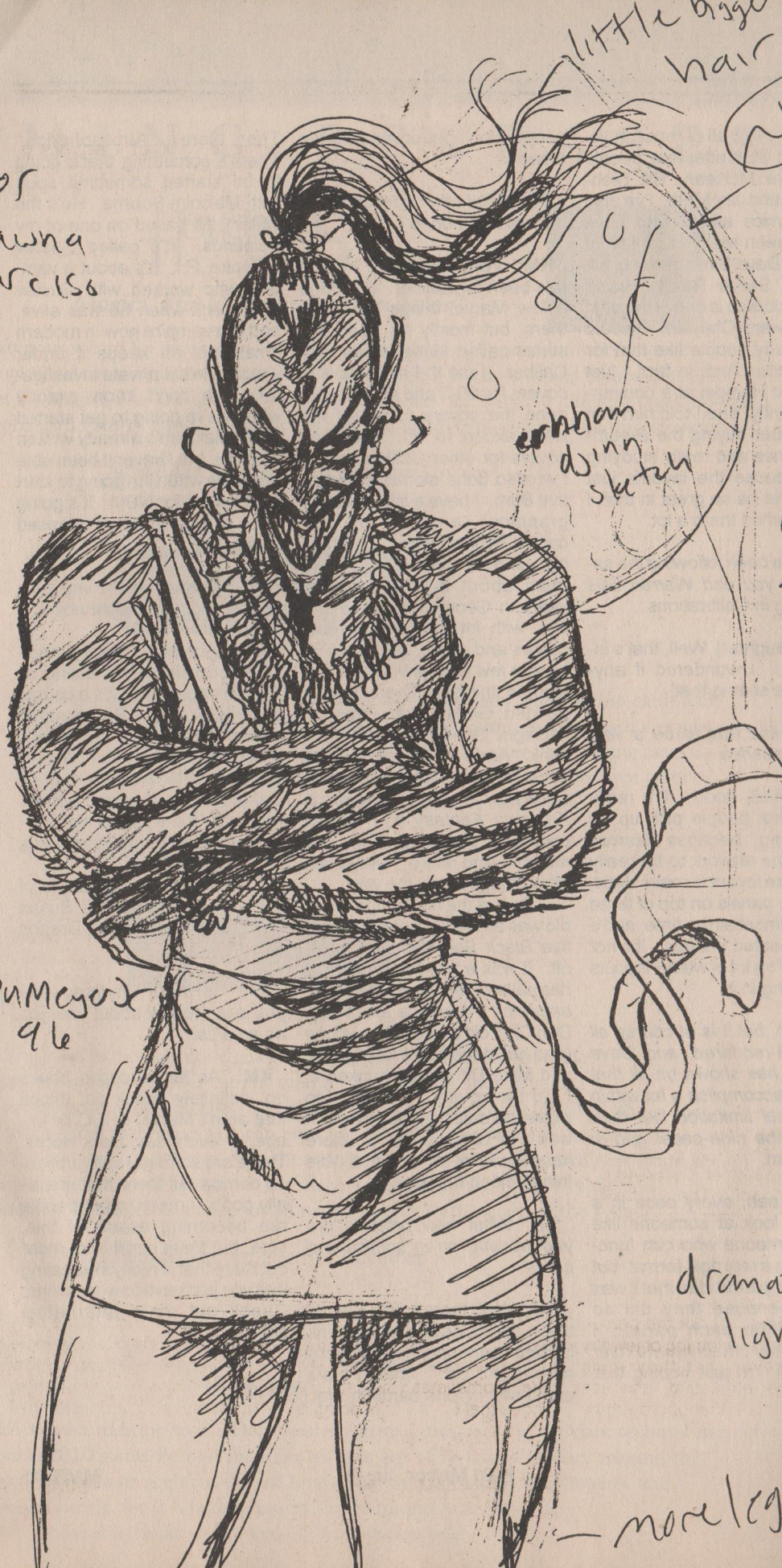
ST: *It definitely adds power to the picture.*

KM: Yeah, I think that one turned out all right.

ST: *What artwork were you inspired by?*

KM: Well, I've always read comics, since I was a kid. That's actually how I learned to draw. I used to copy comics with carbon paper. Then, later, I would copy the comic as it sat beside the paper I was drawing on. So I learned some from comics. I was also into people like Michelangelo, and El Greco, and painters like that, the Italian Renaissance painters. And then, as I got older, I got more heavily into contemporary illustration. So I'd look at people like Bob Peak, who's a pretty common [influence] among comic illustrators. Bernie Fuchs, Jim Sharpe, a lot of commercial illustrators like that. And then other people I got into later, like Gustav Klimt, I like him a lot. Then, as the comics of the seventies came along and people came into it like Barry [now Windsor-] Smith and Berni(e) Wrightson, and Jim Starlin—I

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Narciso



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Ken Meyer
96

dramatic low
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more legs

was really into all of those guys. And then later, after that, people like Dave McKean, Bill Sienkiewicz, and Jay Muth. I've also liked comics artists who have always been really great layout people. Dave Sim's really great at that, Steve Rude... Frank Miller of course is one of the best at it, Howard Chaykin. I would really study people like that for the layouts. And, in fact, I just met Marc Hempel at a convention recently, and I told him that I remember buying the *Breath-taker* series and really studying that, because the layouts just seemed to be so great in that, I really studied them a lot.

ST: *I've been following the series that you and Warren Ellis are doing in Calibrations...*

KM: [laughter] Well, that's interesting. I wondered if anybody was seeing that!

ST: *I find that to be a very intriguing series.*

KM: Well, good. I'm really hoping that people pick up on the writing, because Warren wanted the artwork to be really static. The layout is really static, just three panels on top of three panels almost all the time, and a lot of repeated images. It's not like there's a lot of wacky layouts or anything in it.

ST: *Oh, but it is of course all very well-rendered, and Dave Gibbons has shown us all that you can accomplish a lot within an artificial limitation like that. Look at the nine-panel grid in Watchmen.*

KM: Yeah, every once in a while I'll look at someone like that. Someone who can function within a real rigid format, but you never got the idea that it was boring because they did so much within each panel. I wouldn't say I'm anywhere near that good, I'm just hoping that

people don't get bored with the artwork!

ST: *What other comics material have you done?*

KM: Well, recently a lot of it has been for Caliber. I've done a few Marvel things here and there, but mostly it's been this series called *Kilroy is Here* for Caliber. I did the interiors and covers for #0-3 and #5, and I've done the covers for all of the issue except for #1. I've done covers for other Caliber books. I've also done stories in *Negative Burn*. I have a little autobiographical series of my own called "Project High." It comes out kind of sporadically, and talks about my high school years in Georgia in the seventies, with integration. So that comes and goes. And there've been a few Marvel things, a few painted things. There was a painted Ghost Rider story in *Midnight Sons Unlimited* #4, I think. And I've actually helped out a few people on deadlines, twice now: a couple of pages in *Amazing Fantasy* #17 and a couple of pages of *Inner Demons*. And there have been other things along the way.

One of the first things I ever did was an *Adolescent Radioactive Black Belt Hamsters* spin-off. It was a two-issue mini-series called *Clint the Hamster Triumphant*. It was a lot of fun. Don Chin did some of the writing (and he let me add a lot of stuff), and Mike Dringenberg inked it. I did the covers. I tried to do movie parodies on the covers. It was a lot of fun to do. So there have been a lot of weird little things along the way.

ST: *What new projects are you working on in comics and cards?*

KM: Well, there's *The Sabbath* that I mentioned. I don't think it's been announced when that's coming out yet. I think I have about twenty-one cards in that.

Then there's "Atmospherics." There's something that's going to be started sometime soon with Malcolm Bourne. He's the writer. It's based on one of my paintings. It's called *Gustav Vampire, P.I.* It's about a vampire who worked with Gustav Klimt back when he was alive, and is a vampire now in modern times, but he keeps it under wraps. He's a private investigator. We don't know exactly when we're going to get started on it. Malcolm's already written a lot of it, but I haven't been able to decide when I'm going to start it. It will be for NBM. It's going to be a graphic novel released in late 1997.

ST: *Is there anything else you're working on right now?*

KM: Actually, I just remembered something. It's sitting on my table right now. It's a couple of cards for a Clive Barker game based on one of his series called *Imajica*. I can't remember what other artists are doing it, there are a lot of good artists who are doing cards on it. I have four cards that I'm doing for that game.

There's also a couple of cards in the game that Susan Van Camp put together, *Dragon Storm*.

ST: *Is there anything else you'd like to say about your job as an artist?*

KM: As far as comic books go, definitely check out things that aren't Marvel or DC or Image, or even, say, Dark Horse. There are so many self-published comics out there that are really good. I mean, more people are becoming aware of this, sure, but there's still a lot more out there that is really interesting that you just have to work to find. Check out more alternative stuff. ■



KM
5/96



UNPUBLISHED MAGIC CARD FROM MIRAGE

Mirage

by Steven Tice

As this issue goes to press, the first cards from the *Mirage* stand-alone Magic expansion will be hitting the stores. In late July and early August I interviewed Joel Mick, Bill Rose, and Mark Rosewater in order to uncover some secrets behind the creation of *Mirage*. Pete Venters also provided some information on the story behind the set.

Will there be many new general card concepts in Mirage, such as cumulative upkeep and cantrips from Ice Age?

Joel Mick: Yes. There are two new game rules: flanking and phasing. Flanking is a new creature ability. Phasing is an ability that any permanent (creature, land, artifact or enchantment) can have. It is somewhat like cumulative upkeep, in that it makes the card less than fully permanent, but it does so in a novel way—which is by making the card only be in play half of the time.

Bill Rose: Yes. We have two new abilities, flanking and phasing. In addition, we have cards that bounce other cards to the top of your library. We also have cumulative upkeep cards and cantrips.

Mark Rosewater: There are two new creature abilities: flanking and phasing. Also, there are a number of new card mechanics. I'm not at liberty to say what these are, but they do allow players to do things they could not do before.

Will there be special land types for Mirage like the snow-covered lands for Ice Age?

Joel: There will be no variations on basic lands (which is basically what snow-covered lands are). There will be basic land, with four new pieces of art for each basic land type. In addition, there will be several non-basic lands.

Mark: Let's just say that I wouldn't get your hopes up for Jungle Forests or Jungle Plains.

Will Mirage contain a significant quantity of power cards, in keeping with the most recent expansion, Alliances?

Joel: Our goal is to create a lot of cards that players will like (due to power), but that do not "break the game" by being so strong as to dominate the vast majority of other cards. We succeeded in doing this in *Alliances*, and I believe we succeeded again with *Mirage*. I think players will be excited and amazed by all of the powerful new effects we've created in *Mirage*.

Bill: Yes. Most *Mirage* Developers were on the *Alliances* development team. WotC R&D has a common vision for the power level of Magic. Both *Alliances* and *Mirage* are part of this vision.

Mark: I guarantee that there will be cards that people will get very excited about when they open their packs.

What percentage of Mirage cards will be basic set cards with different artwork?

Joel: The percentage of cards in *Mirage* that reprint previously published card powers is about the same as it was for *Ice Age*. The reason we reprint card powers like this is because some effects are so basic and elegant in their simplicity that it is not worthwhile to create more complicated variations.

Bill: Seven point five percent; all commons (unlike *Ice Age*, none are uncommons).

Looking to the future: Mirage is one of only two new card sets released this year. Will WotC maintain this pace in 1997, or will there be more than two expansions next year?

Joel: We have not finalized our 1997 product release schedule yet, but I expect that we will try to produce three new Magic expansion sets next year.

What is the overall theme of Mirage?

Pete Venters: Theme? Well this was an opportunity to explore the wondrous variety of animals in the tropics (who doesn't love tigers?), and a chance to introduce some much needed racial variety into Magic, which was becoming rather too heavily Caucasian! The story explores a land known as Jamuraa, that has had magical traditions far older than the Brother's War and has come up with some unique ways of incorporating magic into everyday life, such as the five guilds—Civic, Shaper, Shadow, Armorer and Granger—whose memberships are composed almost entirely of mages. The planeswalker Teferi vanishes while trying out some very unstable experiments into

time, and by the time he returns he finds his land has become embroiled in a war with an opportunistic mage bent on dominating Jamuraa.

What section of Dominia will Mirage explore?

Pete: It's the extreme northwest of a series of tropical continents upon Dominaria. The majority of these continents are controlled by the lizard men, the Viashino, and the various Arabian Empires that have come from the planes of Rabiah.

Mark, as a developer of Alliances and Mirage, what special problems have you encountered that needed to be fixed in order for the sets to work?

Mark: Most of development is just tweaking the cards to either adjust their power level, fix some flavor issue or just increase the "fun factor" of a card.

Do you have any anecdotes from the development process of either of those sets?

Mark: The dynamics of the development team are always interesting. Each person has their own hot issues that they watch out for. I, for example, tend to be the protector of the power cards and the heavy flavor cards. One of the other developers is very focused on overall card balance, particularly creatures. The joke in meetings now is that if he and I agree on an issue, we know that we can move on, as the opposites have found common ground.■

SAGE OF LAT NAM

SPOT ILLO SKETCH



Richard Garfield

by Steven Tice

Richard Garfield, creator of Magic: The Gathering, was gracious enough to answer a few questions for us via e-mail in this mini-interview.

What aspect of Magic are you most proud of?

The variety that magic has to offer. I have always preached variety in games over any particular game. When I was playing bridge, I had to resist being sucked into the "one game" mode that most bridge players had: that bridge was the only game worth playing. I still play a wide variety of games, but I keep coming back to Magic because the breadth of the play experience never ceases to surprise me. I am always finding new ways to play, whether it stems from new card mixes, new construction rules, new draft rules, new league formats, or some combination of these things.

I was fascinated by your Duelist column suggesting the need for game criticism. Has there been much response to that column? Have any steps been taken to further your desire for a language and forum for game theory?

I received quite a bit of feedback. I consider that article one of the best I have written. I have taken small steps toward my goal of a body of critique, but I haven't begun a book or anything (yet). My first goal is to get the people I work with to talk the same language I do, so that our discussion of games can be more productive. I think this project is moving along. One of the

first steps is to get everyone to agree that it needs to be done, and most people I work with see that.

How much time do you spend with Magic nowadays, with so many other games taking up your time?

I spend hardly any time designing, though that may

necessary and inevitable. In general, though, I think the company is doing a fine job in focusing upon providing the best game experience possible as a means toward growing and staying healthy, which is the correct attitude.

What is your favorite Magic expansion, and why?

"Every expansion has brought something new to the Magic environment, something valuable."

change soon. I have started talking with some folks here about participating in an expansion. I spend some time on the big picture, as a consultant; that is, how should 5th edition change, how complicated should the expansions be, how should we change the rules, what products would bring new players into the game, and so forth. I spend the most time playing, usually a tournament each week (small tournaments of about thirty people, since I cannot participate in sanctioned events).

Wizards of the Coast has changed dramatically from the company it was when Magic was first produced. How do you feel about the changes WoTC has undergone?

The changes are usually beyond good and bad; they are

Every expansion has brought something new to the Magic environment, something valuable. If I had to pick an expansion as my favorite I would go *Ice Age* for stand alone and *Alliances* for regular expansion. I like these expansions not for any particular innovation, but because of the overall synthesis of the card mixes; the new ideas and the atmosphere—the way it all fit together.

(And a lighter question to wrap this up...) Why is Wall of Ice a green card?

Green was meant to be the forces of nature as well as nature itself, so *Ice Storm*, *Tornado*, *Hurricane* and so forth are all legitimate green flavored cards. The *Wall of Ice* was meant to be something of a glacier. It is not my best job with flavor, but it isn't that far off! ■



CHIEF OF FIRE.

Pete Venters

by Steven Tice

Pete Venters spent much of his career in comics, then moved primarily to card illustration. He became best known to Magic fans as the artist of the Sengir Family for the *Homelands* expansion, an assignment which by roundabout means landed him a position as a Continuity Coordinator at Wizards of the Coast. This interview was conducted via e-mail. Pete also contributed information for the *Homelands*, *Alliances*, and *Mirage* articles this issue.

What Magic cards are you most proud of?

Wandering Mage, Baron Sengir, the upcoming Phyrexian Dreadnought (*Mirage*) and Talruum Champion (*Visions*).

What Magic cards are you least proud of?

All three of my cards that appeared in *The Dark* (Brainwash, Erosion, and Cleansing). I think Erosion is okay, but the other two strike me as rather uninspired. Ironically, Erosion and Brainwash are the only two of my cards to be added to the Fourth Edition as commons, so I've ended up signing a lot of them!

What Magic card posed the greatest artistic challenge to render?

Every one! There's always some new problem to solve. If I take a few weeks break, I have to practically persuade myself that I am actually capable of painting to the quality of the last

pieces I did. But one that I remember clearly caused problems was Storm Spirit. The color palette left little room for mistakes, as violets are tough to blend, and even tougher to blend into white. Nowadays my methods have changed, and this wouldn't be quite such a headache.

How does doing card game artwork differ from other projects you've worked on?

Mostly the sheer freedom to experiment, but also the unusually large percentage of size reduction between original and final card (anything from three hundred to six hundred percent!)

What would you say are your strengths and weaknesses as an artist?

My strengths include good dynamism married with compositional skills, increasingly bright color, the ability to tell a story in a single frame, characterization, a weird imagination, and experience in working in the card medium.

Weaknesses...[I'm] not yet good enough at rendering really beautiful women. I'm constantly dissatisfied with blending techniques and color saturation, [I have] some anatomical problems, and I especially dislike the way I paint fingers (though the pencils are okay). [There's my] inexperience with costuming, and no matter how weird [it is], I still don't think my imagination is weird enough.

Is there anything you particularly enjoy about doing card artwork?

As above. I've also done a lot of comic work (mostly unpublished), and I enjoy the freedom of creating something and knowing I won't have to repeat the image from a dozen different angles throughout a comic strip.

My one regret is that I wish I could take more time over each piece, but deadlines are invariably tight.

How do you go about creating a Magic card? What are the steps involved?

Well, after getting the assignment, studying the art description, noting any pertinent details (especially the color of the card and the creature's stats), I have to build a pencil sketch. The sketch can take anything from twenty minutes to days, and some of the easiest concepts can be swines to translate to paper. For instance, I never imagined I would have as much trouble designing Baron Sengir's face (I knew his costume was going to be tough!), but it required a lot of subtlety to get it just right. I think the effort paid off, though. After the sketch is approved, the finished acrylic painting takes roughly ten to thirty work hours split across several evenings (since I have a day job at WotC).

The color of the border can often effect the final look of the painting. Do you take the color of the card into account when painting a card?

It's the primary factor for design. Two creatures with duplicate abilities, one in red, the other in blue, could have vastly different looks.

What artwork were you inspired by?

I drew most of my inspiration from Seventies DC comics, the puppet shows of Gerry Anderson, and all kinds of weird stuff. In my teenage years I liked the works of Constable, Turner, and Monet. Nowadays I've lost my taste for a lot of some fine art, and I despise a lot of the tripe that poses as current modern art. I continue to be inspired by a variety of illustrators such as Brom, Sienkiewicz, Ezra Tucker, Anson [Maddocks], Quinton Hoover, Mark Tedin, Glenn Fabry, Dermot Power, John Bolton, James Gurney and many others.

Have comics been an influence on your artwork?

They were the primary art form I worked in since the age of three. I pride myself on good storytelling skills and good characterization. I feel the reason I didn't really make it in comics was because I didn't like working in the outlandish dynamism and unrealistic anatomy of the superhero genre.

I had a few Judge Dredd stories published in Britain, and a forty-page horror graphic novel published by Tundra, called *Sweetmeats*. It's still currently available in the Bad Blood collection from Kitchen Sink, but people should be aware that it's pretty adult stuff, not due to graphic violence but due to really unpleasant psychological drama. It's still one of my proudest achievements.

What do you do in your new position at WotC?

Well, I'm called a Continuity Coordinator, and a friend once said to me that I had the job several thousand gamers would kill for, but judge for your-

self...I'm the primary story driver for the Magic sets. I meet with Editing and R&D to pick card names, finalize flavor text, etc. My full job requirements are to create final versions of card set backstories and be able to answer on demand any questions about those stories, to aid in the creation of card titles and flavor text, to coordinate flavor text creation, and to aid International with translation questions regarding characters in card sets. After all, they have to know the gender of the characters to create accurate translations in many languages. I also aid in the building of the Magic Database, including additional story info not yet seen in publication, and the creation of maps (I'm just in the process of completing a full color Jamuraa map, and have a black and white globe of Dominaria 80% complete). I create the "look" of cultures in Dominia, and troubleshoot all story issues, including articles for magazines (I've given quite a lot of info to a couple of *Inquest* articles in the past few months). And there's my own personal campaign to get more articles about the Worlds of Dominia into print.

What Dominia projects are you currently working on, besides new cards?

I'm aiding the writers of Encyclopedia Dominia on the Duelist Web Site. Its going to be very cool.

How did you land the Sengir family assignment for Homelands?

I was in Seattle to talk to Wizards about a project which never happened, and I was talking to Scott Hungerford and Kyle Namvar about the Sengir family because it related to the project. As it turned out, it was only a few days before the card art was to

be assigned, and I was told by Scott and Kyle that they wanted the core family of the Baron, Granny and Irini, and the Castle, to be painted by the same artist to ensure a cohesive look. Naturally I wanted to do it, so I asked the *Homelands* art director, Sandra Everingham, if I could do them, and she said "sure." Luckily, I managed to grab them early, too, as it turns out Chris Rush had his eye on the Baron! Well, he's had a lot of super-popular cards, so I don't feel at all bad about beating him to the punch!

Will the setting of the CD-ROM game be worked into Dominia history?

If you mean Microprose's game, it already is. Shandalar played a role in the escape of Faralyn, Leshrac and Tevesh Szat at the end of the *Ice Age*. If you mean Acclaim's, that's set in Corondor, which is the featured continent within their comics, and its part of Dominaria. If at all possible, everything created for Magic is part of the Worlds of Dominia.

Is there any project in the works which will provide Magic players with a map and history of Dominia/Dominaria?

The 1997 Wall Calendar contains a color rendition of the Domains, which is the focal continents of Dominaria, where such notable sites as the Hurloon Mountains, Benalia, Llanowar Forest, Shanodin Forest, Ironclaw Mountains, Foriys, Avenant and many others can be found. The map was designed by me and illustrated by Tom Waenerstrand. Hopefully the globe of Dominaria will transfer to a wall map sometime next year.

As for Dominia, it's a series of overlapping dimensions which are in constant flux, so it

WANDERING MAGE SKETCH.



any but the most stable planes. However, Continuity has toyed with the idea of building Dominia out of snap-fit molecule kits! But, frankly, Dominia is such a limitless expanse which does not necessarily work by our understanding of three dimensions, that a wall map couldn't really do it justice.

Are there any plans to cover any other interesting regions of Dominia in 1997's Magic releases, or is it too early to discuss them?

Well, Dominia is the entire multiverse within which Magic is set, and all the card sets take place there (remember, *Arabian Nights* is part of the 1001 Arabian planes in Dominia; for more info,

Please explain the genesis of the following cards, which are among your best and most interesting Magic cards:

Lhurgoyf

Well, the Lhurgoyf is an example of green magic becoming harsher to survive the taxing environs of an Ice Age. The creature digs frozen corpses from the snow and ice (note the wide, scooping hands and feet) and has an incredibly powerful set of mandibles that can crush and grind a corpse easily--bones included! When the Lhurgoyf finds live prey, it is best to run, as the Lhurgoyf considers warm meat a luxury. I just had the best time painting all the gruesome textures on the Lhurgoyf's hide!

Castle Sengir

The Baron took the castle from its original owners, a group of dwarven masons, but before he was done with them, he made them add some towers to the building. That's why the castle is an odd mix of the stout wide construction style of the dwarves and the high towers of the Baron. The castle is built upon a large rock that juts from the surrounding marsh. The Baron's thralls live in damp wooden villages built upon the higher piles of mud and muck of the swamp, and their existence is a tortured one. The only way to reach the castle is by boat or across the myriad rope bridges. Either of these leaves a traveler open to attack from the Baron, his vampires, and the gargoyles that dot his castle, all of whom can fly and can easily cast a victim into the marsh. The painting was essentially an exercise in single point light source--an attempt to mold something from the shadows.

"The breadth of information about Dominia is fascinating."

see the Encyclopedia Dominia on *Duelist's* Web Site). So, needless to say, the expansions will be in Dominia. If you mean the planet Dominaria, we'll probably be leaving that planet soon and exploring some other parts of the multiverse.

What's the story behind the Feast or Famine card art? How does the story told there relate to the functioning of the card?

You're keeping the zombies placated by throwing people to them. If you stop, the zombies rise and will begin to feed their appetite wherever they desire.

Baron Sengir

I was building upon Anson's original design of the Sengir Vampire. I added the ponytail and forked beard to give more character and nobility. The breastplate is a very stylized bat symbol, and the loose cut of the clothing is a device to hint at the styles of dress the Baron wore before he came to Ulgrotha. We'll let that secret out some other time! I labored long and hard to find the correct angle, finally settling on this low shot to give the Baron a more dominating position. The crystal ball was added to give a strong light source, and the image was tilted to lessen the static nature of the shot and to show more of the Baron.

Grandmother Sengir

Well, as you will know if you read the *Homelands* comic, the Grandmother is actually an ancient planeswalker called Ravi, and the only survivor of the cataclysm that destroyed an army of mages. She's now a gnarled old crone, completely insane and immensely powerful. She's not a planeswalker anymore due to the terrible effects of the Apocalypse Chime, and her power has been on the wane for some time, but she's still a match for any little upstart. If you take a look in the background you'll see a basket of wicker horns. Granny is one of the few people who knows the spell to change a Serra Angel into a Fallen Angel. My favorite part of this painting was Granny's green dress, which has a lovely, almost satiny, look about it. Unfortunately,

that didn't transfer to the printed card too well.

Heart of Yavimaya

The Heart is the central intelligence that controls the entire Yavimaya forest. It is the power that animates the woodland for miles around. The "Heart" is a large plant, some twelve feet in height. The shot is from below, looking up as a rain shower pelts down past the background trees and towards camera.

Lake of the Dead

The Lake of the Dead is the lake surrounding Tresserhorn, Lim Dul's keep. Here is where the necromancer disposed of all of his failed experiments, so the water is filled with foul corpses and semi-aware undead. I painted this with a broad wash of a light aquamarine blue. The paint was heavily loaded with retarder, and I worked into it with raw umber for the shadows and pure water for the highlights. The water would strip portions of the paint away, leaving discolored but unpainted paper showing. Its proven to be one of my best "mood" pieces.

Omen of Fire

This is a shot of the rogue Kjeldoran, General Varchild. She stands screaming a battle cry as a Balduvian hut burns in the midground. The falling comet is the sign that Varchild has awaited to begin her final attack on Balduvia. This was one of the oversized pieces I have done recently. It was created as both a card piece and as a character study of Varchild. The character study was designed for potential advertising and it appeared on the cover of *Inquest*, while the card area contains all of the elements necessary to convey the meaning of the piece. This is a

curious card because I designed the character, created the card title, painted the illustration, and wrote the flavor text! The only thing I didn't do was create the game mechanic!

Phyrexian Portal

Phyrexia is a horrifying plane of ashen landscapes, mile-high furnaces, and oil rain. Dealing with the denizens of this plane is always inadvisable. The mage in this piece is beginning to wish he hadn't activated it, as his spell tome is torn from his hands and the arms of Phyrexian Gremlins reach through to claim him. The portal is also tilting forward, much like a loose desk lamp, and in an instant it will swing down upon the mage, sucking him into Phyrexia. This is no passive portal that you step through; it will actively suck you in!

Wandering Mage

This is one of the few mages who sickened of the elitism of the School of the Unseen. She has quit the school and now roams Terisiare, aiding those villages that still survive. Though she is a mage, many believe her to be a faith healer, so she has occasionally been labeled as a priest.

This was one of my favorite paintings to date. I penciled the picture one Saturday night, and within an hour I knew it was one of the best compositions I'd done in a while. When it came time to paint the piece, I was a little nervous, as it would be so easy to mess up the pencil work. Thankfully it came through, and best of all WotC used it on their *Alliances* T-Shirts (first I knew of this was when the art director of the T-shirts asked me if I could help trim the image's edges for setting on the shirt). Unfortunately, the piece wasn't scanned properly, so it's a little light, but I rescanned it for the

foreign language editions and I hope to find a copy soon. It should be darker, with a better breadth of color.

How do you feel about the public reaction to the story-oriented Homelands expansion?

The actual percentage of players interested in the story is an unknown quantity. If you were to take a poll of players at a Pro Tour, I think it would be lower than average interest in the stories, as the tournaments attract the hard-core competitors, not those caught up in the world. If we were to do a show about the stories, I believe we'd attract a different portion of our customers—though of course there'd be no big money prize to persuade people to travel across the country for. I've run a couple of seminars on the Worlds of Dominia and they've always attracted a really hard-core fan base. It seems you're either not really interested, or you're *really* interested! There's no middle ground. I could be wrong, but WotC's never really explored this avenue enough to judge its popularity. The Encyclopedia Dominia portion of the Duelist Web Site might give us an idea by tracking the number of hits it receives. Hopefully, before the year is out, we'll have more Dominia info reaching the public on a regular basis.

As a side note, we had a tour come through the WotC building the other day. I showed them the prototype Jamuraa map and I also showed them the Dominaria globe, pointing out where places like Hurlon, Benalia, Jamuraa, Shanodin, Terisiare, Shiv, Sarpadia, etc., could be found. They were very interested—some had big grins and wide eyes—so I certainly think there's a market for this stuff. Trust me, the breadth of information about Dominia is fascinating. ■

HELIOT GREATFLAME - Susan Van Camp



World Decks

by Steven Tice

Have you ever imagined playing a Magic deck that encompassed all of the cards available to Magic? Have you ever considered the incredible variety of combinations possible in a deck of that size? Have you ever pondered the ways in which such a deck could operate? Then you're a possible candidate for playing World Decks for Magic.

Why World Decks?

The accepted deck-building methods for Magic emphasize the size of the deck. The smallest possible deck allowable is the optimum deck design, in order to maximize the likelihood that you'll be able to predict the cards you will draw. This method produces solid, tournament-level decks.

Unfortunately, this method eliminates what I consider to be the most enjoyable aspect of Magic, which is the variety of cards available for play. I like to be surprised by which cards I draw, and I like to draw different cards each time I play a deck. The vast majority of Magic cards never see play in tournament-level decks; even sealed-deck competition only goes so far to promote card variety. The tremendous quantity and variety of Magic cards is one thing that attracted me to the game in the first place; the high-infinite number of possible card combinations was irresistible to me. I therefore desired a system for playing Magic that would mimic the random generation tables of the role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons*.

One of the things that attracted me to AD&D when I dis-

covered that game in high school was the fact that you could create a world populated by a whole bookful of monsters, many pages of spells, hundreds of magic items, all the equipment you could ever want...the possibilities were endless! Better yet, you could place a player in any kind of terrain with no pre-game preparation, and still access all of these things by a chain of random generation tables. After discovering Magic, I decided that I wanted to be able to play Magic in a way somewhat similar to this, where as many cards as possible could interact with each other. Thus World Decks were born.

What is a World Deck?

Imagine a world with, say, four large continents. Each continent contains a predominance of three basic land types, with Plains common to all continents. These continents are populated with all the creatures and spells of Magic for the terrain types represented on those continents.

In game terms, this takes the form of four large, three-color decks. These decks can be placed in a large card box which represents the world. When you wish to play Magic, simply pick up your box/world, take it to your Magic venue, and play the deck/continent of your choice.

When playing these decks, any combination of creatures and spells of these colors, plus many artifacts, may come into play. Every game brings a new combination, a new discovery, a new strategy, and new counter-strategies. Every game is unique. You never know which cards you'll draw, and will be challenged to develop a strat-

egy based on the random combinations you have drawn.

Building a World Deck

There are a number of decisions that need to be made when creating a World Deck. You can't just throw a bunch of cards together with some mana and expect to have a playable deck.

Number of Colors. The first decision you have to make is how many colors to include in a deck. While a five-color deck would contain the optimum number of possible combinations, it would be so unwieldy that it would be difficult to manage, and at the same time would be so unlikely to provide you with the correct color of mana to cast the spells you've drawn that the games would rarely be playable. This is why I've utilized the idea of a group of decks that represent as many color combinations as possible.

I decided to create four three-color decks, with two primary colors per deck and one secondary color common to all four decks. In order to maximize the playability of the decks, I decided that white would be the third color for all four of my decks. Why white? Well, the defensive nature of the color makes it perfect as a support color for any other colors. Plus, the casting ease and power of such cards as *Circles of Protection*, *Disenchant*, and *Swords to Plowshares* makes white very, very useful. I then chose four two-color combinations that I liked: Blue/Green, Red/Black, Blue/Black, and Red/Green. With this set-up, there are only two color combinations that are not supported by my World Decks: Blue/Red and Black/Green. This is my only

disappointment with my decks, as those are both very interesting color combinations. Perhaps I will add a couple of continents to my world eventually!

Land Quantity. The next important consideration is how much land to include in the deck. By playing three colors, you are much more likely to draw the mana that you need than if you play four or five colors, while a sprinkling of lands and artifacts that create any color of mana can allow you to cast those pesky multi-colored spells that require a color you don't have (I've gotten Xira Arien into play seven of the nine times I've drawn her in my Red/Green deck, by always having some method for getting that off-color black mana). I've discovered that unlike smaller decks, which generally require a card to land ratio of 2:1, the World Decks can generally get by just fine with a ratio of 3:1. This is helpful, because with so many cards in the deck already, the fewer land cards you can get away with including in the deck, the more manageable it will be. Note that it's still quite possible to have games in which you either fail to draw any land for a long time, or draw nothing but land, just as with any regular deck.

Card Selection. The next important decision to make is how many duplicate cards to include in the deck, since the fewer duplicates you have, the greater the number of different cards you can include in the deck. There are, however, certain combinations that only work well if there's more than one of a particular card in play (such as Aurochs or most of the Rat cards). I also find it useful to stick to the Duelist Convocation rules for deck building: no more than four copies of any one card and no more than one of any restricted card, although banned cards are allowed as if they were restricted cards. There are five important deck selection criteria to consider:

Utility. You should consider the usefulness of the card. A spell such as Disenchant or Counterspell is so useful and powerful that having fewer than four in a deck is foolish, especially since the chance of drawing them decreases as the size of the deck increases. On the other hand, there's no point in having more than one of a card that is rarely useful, and some cards can be omitted entirely. I will note, however, that one of the most enjoyable aspects of the World Decks is that you may win a game with a card that's so rarely useful that you'd probably never even play with it in a normal deck. Delivering the killing blow with your Winter Sky can be strangely satisfying! So I would recommend including at least one of each of the cards that doesn't actively hurt you.

Rarity. The rarity of the cards should also be a consideration. It can be more difficult and/or more expensive for you to obtain many rare cards. But, more importantly, having a greater quantity of commons than rares adopts the principle of creature frequency. If you're exploring a swamp continent, you should expect to see Plague Rats more often than you see Grandmother Sengir. Thus it makes more sense to include more common cards than rare cards, keeping in mind the usefulness of a particular card. You're simply wasting space by including more than one Hill Giant in most World Decks, but having three or four Prodigal Sorcerers is a good idea. By the same token, some rare cards are so useful and/or fun to play in a variety of ways, that having more than one is a good thing. The Time Elemental, for instance, is useful enough in so many ways that I prefer to encounter it more often than other rare cards in my deck, so I have two Elementals in each of my blue decks. On

the other hand, the Shivan Dragon, while a powerful card, is still rather one-dimensional in its use (a large, pumpable flier), so I have one Shivan Dragon in one of my red decks, and that's it. Besides, you appreciate your Dragon more when he's a special, unique creature that is rarely seen!

Theme. Deck theme is important. Is there a predominance of creatures on one continent that is not present on another with the same terrain? In my decks, the Sengir family from *Homelands* resides solely on my Blue/Black continent, although Sengir Vampires and the ubiquitous Sengir Bats have spread to my Red/Black continent as well. My Lord of the Pit exists only on the Red/Black continent, as does the Shivan Dragon and most Minotaurs. The Urza lands are all located on the Blue/Green continent, while the greatest preponderance of Legends is on the Red/Green continent. Since white is present on all of my continents, white common creatures such as Tundra Wolves and Pearled Unicorns are among the most basic lifeforms throughout my world. Designing by theme thus accomplishes two things: (1) it reduces creature repetition and the need to obtain duplicates of rare, expensive cards, and (2) it provides a design element similar to designing a world in Dungeons and Dragons. You are, effectively, the Dungeon Master, deciding which creatures to place on which continent.

Compatibility. You must consider the function of a card in relation to the colors you are playing. You probably wouldn't want to place Karma in your Black/White deck, for example, or Anarchy in your Red/White deck. Also, many cards are created to work well with certain other colors (Tinder Wall provides good mana support in a

Red/Green deck, for instance). Other times the decisions are less obvious, but still important. When I recently expanded my decks by obtaining a *Legends* set, I specifically placed Moat (which, being white, was a candidate for any of my decks) in my Blue/Black deck, because I felt that was the deck most likely to provide me with fliers, which are unaffected by Moat. So far it's worked exactly as planned!

Deck Size. Perhaps most basically, you must consider the size of your World Deck. I've allowed my World Decks to grow over time to approximately one thousand cards apiece. Part of the process of adding cards from a new expansion is evaluating which cards from previous expansions worked or didn't work. When *Ice Age* introduced cantrips, I included three or four copies of each cantrip in my decks. After playing with them for a few months, I was able to determine which cantrips were worth keeping in quantity (Touch of Death probably being the best), and which needed removed in order to make room for other cards (Snowfall was so rarely useful that I removed it completely from both of my blue decks). Nevertheless, your decks will continue to grow even as you remove cards from them, unless you're willing to eliminate some cards entirely. I keep track of the cards in my decks with a computer database program.

There are many factors which must be considered when creating your World Deck(s). The most important thing is to create a balance which reflects your personality and your desires for your decks. As with all Magic decks, card selection is the most important factor in constructing a playable, competitive World Deck.

The World Deck's Strengths and Weaknesses

Weaknesses. The weaknesses of the World Deck should be obvious. Against a high-caliber, well-played tournament deck, the World Deck will almost always be defeated. After all, there's a reason why sixty-card decks are the recommended tournament size! While your opponent has his carefully designed strategy working to perfection, you're most likely to still be trying to develop a strategy for the random cards you've drawn. This does, however, tend to make it

ever, so World Decks are not particularly inferior to conventional decks in this way.

Strengths. World Decks tend to work best in multi-player games. If your World Deck is starting off slowly, you usually have the time to develop something, because your faster opponents are too busy with each other to bother with a non-threat like you. I've often won multi-player games simply by being the turtle that wins the race after the hares have knocked each other out.

(A World Deck does not always start out slowly, however; in one recent game I drew

The most significant factor in playing a World Deck is the skill of the player.

all the more satisfying when you beat someone playing a tournament deck against your World Deck!

Another obvious weakness is that some cards which are very powerful in small decks (such as Feldon's Cane) are nearly useless in a World Deck; you'd likely never see the cards you returned to your deck from your graveyard again, anyway! Even so, Feldon's Cane could still be used to clear out your graveyard before your opponent animates your Shivan Dragon, for instance.

World Decks also can occasionally hit lulls, where a number of turns will go by without any particularly useful cards showing up. Of course, there are also times when you'll draw nothing but useful card after useful card, although sometimes you don't have sufficient mana to cast them. These are problems which most normal decks suffer from as well, how-

a killer initial hand, with two land (one a Swamp), Deep Spawn, and Dance of the Dead. Turn one: discard Deep Spawn rather than putting a card in play. Turn two: play a Swamp. Turn three: play another land and cast Dance of the Dead to bring Deep Spawn into play as a 7/7 trample creature! Few opponents survive that fast a start, and paying Deep Spawn's upkeep is child's play in a thousand-card deck.)

The size of the World Deck is valuable in other ways, as well. Your opponent can Millstone you turn after turn, and you won't even notice! You'll defeat your opponent long before he can Millstone you to death, unless he has an alternate plan for defeating you. Any strategy based upon running you out of cards will usually do you no harm beyond causing an enormous pile of cards that will be annoying to have to shuffle back into your deck!

The lack of a specific strategy can also work to your advantage. The vaunted Jester's Cap, for example, fails in two ways; not only is removing three cards from a thousand-card deck a strategy of negligible value, you have no specific "key" cards to remove; rather, you have *hundreds* of potential key cards.

Perhaps the greatest strength of your deck is its unpredictable nature. The very thing that makes it so enjoyable to play can make it difficult to play *against*. Beyond sideboarding a few "color hosers" into his deck, there is really nothing an opponent can do in the way of specific preparation for what your deck might confront him with.

Playing World Decks

The most significant factor in playing a World Deck is the skill of the player. Playing a deck that provides you with a random selection of cards requires you to be able to make the most of what you've drawn, and to develop a different strategy using the resources available to you every time you play the deck.

Of course, you will occasionally be faced with streaks of bad luck in your draws; you may draw one land in your initial hand, but not draw another for ten or fifteen turns, resulting almost always in your quick defeat. Or you may draw plenty of land, but no *creatures* for your first five or ten turns, and be stomped to death by your opponent before you get a chance to cast anything useful. But, again, these are problems that conventional decks face, as well; they just get magnified a bit in a World Deck.

Streaks of certain cards will develop as well. Sometimes you'll draw three of your Counterspells in your first thirty cards. Other times the same card will

turn up in every game you play for three or four games with that deck, even though you only have one copy of that card in your thousand-card deck! This is, of course, the same coincidental randomness that I've always found an appealing element in games. One time my Lord of the Pit just kept turning up every time I played my Red/Black deck (talk about the proverbial bad penny!), then disappeared for months.

Another enjoyable aspect of World Decks is that combinations which would be routine in any other deck are so rare as to be really special in a World Deck. It was occasion for celebration the first time I actually got two Plague Rats in play at the same time, and when I got all three Urza lands in play simultaneously! On the other hand, while a devastating combo like Merfolk Assassin/War Barge may seem virtually impossible to get into play when you're playing with one copy of each card in a thousand-card decks, I've already gotten the combo two of the three times I've gotten either of those (recently added) cards! You will always be surprised by the cards and combinations you draw in a World Deck.

One aspect of playing Magic that you normally don't even consider becomes significant when playing a World Deck: shuffling the cards. Obviously, when you have one thousand cards occupying a slot in a big white box, you cannot shuffle the deck in any normal way. I believe the best way to shuffle a World Deck when you've finished a game is to place the cards in different random spots and drop them in one at a time, then shift a few large sections of the deck around to insure maximum card movement.

This method of shuffling also allows you to keep your cards in good condition even if they're not in plastic sheaths, because the primary card de-

stroyer is conventional shuffling, with cards rubbing against each other and banging their edges into each other frequently and repeatedly. With World Decks, you're carefully dropping each card into a randomly opened spot, then shifting a couple of large sections of cards, thereby protecting the cards from significant wear and tear for a much longer time. I have found that it's just as fast to shuffle cards in this fashion as it is to shuffle them in the normal way, unless you've played a very long game or otherwise used a lot of cards (a card like Ashnod's Cylix can result in your using three cards a turn, for instance, all of which need reshuffled into your deck at the end of the game).

World Deck Rules

Unfortunately for World Decks, shuffling is sufficiently annoying and time-consuming that it is preferable to avoid doing it repeatedly during a game. While shuffling between games takes no more time than normal shuffling, shuffling during games can be downright exasperating. Fortunately, the size of the World Deck allows you to get around the problems created by cards that force you to shuffle. Because the bottom few hundred cards of your deck will never see play, simply search the bottom section of your deck for that extra land Untamed Wilds is giving you, or that blue instant for your Merchant Scroll, and don't bother shuffling the deck afterwards. So what if you now know a few of the cards you're not going to draw? You'd have been foolish to count on drawing any of them anyway, in a World Deck. Almost every card that requires shuffling can be handled in this fashion.

A common rule I've adopted for use with World Decks is what I call the "discard if useless" rule. This simply

means that if you draw a Circle of Protection: Blue, and neither you nor any of your opponents is playing blue, you have the option of discarding that card and drawing another. In this manner, you're never stuck with a useless card, and cards that only affect a particular color or land type, etc., become much more worthy of inclusion in your decks. Of course, there are some situations where having a few "useless" cards in your hand can be handy for sacrificing purposes (enchancements to sacrifice to Arenson's Aura, discard cards for various spell or enchantment effects, even decoys for Hymn to Tourach). Also, if you and your opponents are keeping your deck colors secret, this rule cannot be used. But in most other cases, the "discard if useless" rule makes the inclusion of color-specific cards much more productive.

If you find the size of your World Deck to be too unwieldy to play with, you might try using the "active deck" playing method. After shuffling your deck, remove the top hundred or so cards from the top of the deck, and stack them in front of you like any normal library. This becomes your active deck, and any deck manipulation will only involve this deck. In this way, you are creating a more conventional deck by using the top section of your World Deck. One drawback to this method is that cards like Jester's Cap become more useful for your opponent again, as he also manipulates your active deck rather than your whole deck.

A few cards can more easily be played with temporary proxies. Merchant Scroll is a good example. When playing this spell, rather than casting it and then potentially spending a great deal of time searching the deck for the desired spell, simply reveal the Merchant Scroll to your opponent, say "Counterspell" (for example), and then use the Merchant Scroll card as

a proxy Counterspell. Of course, you'd have to keep track of how many Counterspells you've cast, but chances are that even with the Merchant Scroll you probably won't come close to seeing all of your Counterspells in a thousand-card deck, so that's not really a problem.

Ante cards, and cards that require you and your opponent to trade ownership of cards, could be a problem. Try playing these cards by ignoring the ante or trading portion of the card's function. Rebirth, for instance, simply allows both players to return to twenty life if they desire; the ante portion of the spell is ignored. Tempest Efreet is just a red creature with no special abilities. Bronze Tablet simply removes itself and one of your opponent's permanents from the game, with both players retaining ownership of their original cards. In this manner, you can get some enjoyment from cards you might not ordinarily have considered playing!

Alliances—the World Deck's Favorite Expansion!

The recent expansion set, *Alliances*, has numerous cards that are tailor-made for World Decks. There are many cards that allow you to generate a beneficial effect by taking cards from your library and removing them from the game. Needless to say, this is a small price to pay when playing World Decks!

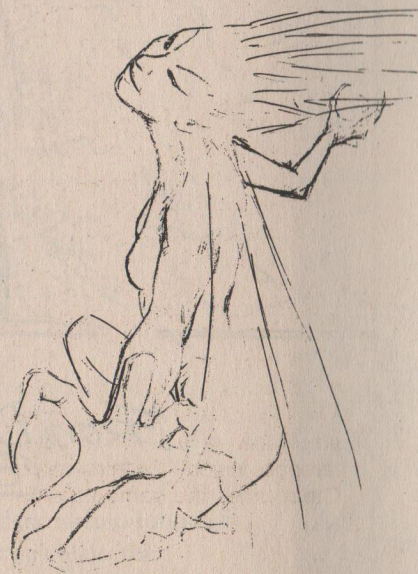
Ashnod's Cylix and Browse allow you to draw cards from the top of your library and select the best card, removing the others from the game. The Royal Herbalist allows you to gain one life for two mana and a card. Seasoned Tactician can protect you from all damage from one source at the price of three mana and four cards. The Whirling Catapult deals one damage to all players and flying creatures for every two mana

and two cards put into it. But perhaps the most powerful of these cards is Thought Lash, which allows you to remove the top card of your library at any time—at a cost of zero mana—to prevent a point of damage. In a World Deck, this card can render you invulnerable, and thus open up many new lines of attack that you otherwise wouldn't have had. That big flier you were saving to block with? Bombs away! That Hurricane that would kill you both? No problem! Even the Cumulative Upkeep on Thought Lash can be manageable for quite a few turns with a World Deck, particularly if it enables you to rapidly enact a winning strategy. And there are still more library manipulation cards in *Alliances*.

In Conclusion...

World Decks for Magic add a very fun and challenging element to the game. If you, too, enjoy Magic for the variety of cards available, I would encourage you to try creating a World Deck. If you're willing to put in the time and effort to create and practice playing these decks, your rewards will be great. ■

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